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Alki



Critical Conversations

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Alki The Washington Library Association Journal

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"Alki," a Chinook word meaning "by and by," was suggested by the late Nancy Pryor, Special Collections at Washington State Library, as a title for the Washington Library Association's journal. "Alki" is also the "unofficial" state motto, signifying a focus on the future.

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Alki's purpose is to communicate philosophical and substantive analyses of current and enduring issues for and about Washington libraries, personnel, and advocates, and to facilitate the exchange of research, opinion, and information.

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Cover attribution: Art by Mary Dempsey. Mary B. Dempsey is a Library Technical Assistant with the King County Library System. A 2019 MLIS graduate from the University of Washington, she loves being creative at the library—including creating this watercolor and ink entry to the staff library card design contest "Building Meaningful Connections" (she didn't win, but it was fun!). In her spare time Mary recommends true crime podcasts to unsuspecting store clerks and reads queer graphic novels with her wife. currently the Vice Chair of the Public Library Division of WLA.

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Connecting Through Conversation

by Danielle H. Miller



Danielle H. Miller

The Washington Library Association community continues to inspire me as library staff and libraries navigate the ongoing challenges of COVID. We had planned to come together and make connections at our WLA conference in Bellevue, but that wasn't able to happen. Many conversations were had with the conference committee, WLA executive team, and WLA leadership. It was a difficult decision, but we needed a solution that would keep our library community safe, honor the work of the people who had submitted programs, and not detrimentally impact WLA financially. To help in the decision making, we administered a flash survey about conference timing and the results indicated that moving the annual conference to spring would be a favorable option.

This allowed us to still offer a great virtual conference option in the fall and move the annual conference in Bellevue to Spring 2022. This affected the plans for the 2023 and 2024 conferences, but both current contracts with Wenatchee and Spokane were willing to move to spring as well. We are excited to return to this time of year and all the possibilities it will bring to serving our library community. I truly applaud the conference committee and WLA staff for the work they did in the transition to virtual for the fall conference and making so much incredible programming available, including a live keynote, live networking events, and on-demand sessions.

I was very honored to moderate the keynote session with bestselling author and speaker Ijeoma Oluo and ALA Executive Director Tracie D. Hall. Their conversation touched on many areas that impact us in our libraries and in the future of library education and library staffing. Ijeoma and Tracie were able to cover many aspects of diversity, equity, and inclusion and antiracism and address questions that were provided by WLA members in

advance of the keynote. One of the things that really resonated with me was the idea that in diversity, equity, and inclusion work, we need to focus on our policies. Focusing on critically examining our policies can make a bigger impact on our communities than simply attending many of the general trainings that organizations are offering or requiring staff to take.

To acknowledge the impact policies can have and to improve them, we've been reviewing our policies and procedures at the Washington Talking Book & Braille Library in addition to trainings. For example, we've had to have many conversations about how to enforce the current mask mandate with visitors to the library. This falls largely on our receptionist and can result in uncomfortable or difficult conversations with visitors who do not wish to wear a mask. We don't want staff to have to get into altercations with anyone, but we do want masks to be offered and visitors to be informed they need to wear a mask to be in the library. Luckily this doesn't happen very often, but to try and make the interaction easier, we've put a basket of masks out on the counter and posted a cute sign showing how to properly wear a mask. Our goal is to make staff and visitors as comfortable as possible and keep the library environment safe.

Within WLA leadership, we continue to have conversations about how to continue our focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion. There has been incredible work done by many of the committees to update their practices with a DEI lens, including the Scholarship Committee for example. This is a great example of working at the policy level to address equity. There is still a lot of work to do, but WLA has a wonderful community of leaders at every level who can come together and move the organization forward. It has been an honor to serve as your board president and participate in this work. I'm eager to see where the future takes us. 📖

Danielle Miller is the director at the Washington Talking Book & Braille Library and the current WLA President.

Hope and Collegiality

by Johanna Jacobsen Kiciman



As I write this, I want to acknowledge that I am on the land of the Coastal Salish people, the traditional home of all tribes and bands within the Duwamish, Suquamish, Tulalip and Muckleshoot nations. I recognize their elders past and present for their ongoing efforts to sustain tribal sovereignty, preserve their culture, and care for this place.

This is my last issue as Editor of Alki. And, if I am honest, I don't quite have the language to reflect on these past two years—where to begin when I feel like I just have gotten started. I will miss this role, but perhaps not for the reasons that first come to mind. I will miss this role because of the incredible community of writers and thinkers in this state whose work I had the privilege to read and edit. The regular columnists for this journal have been a delight with their wit, insight, and alacrity. I will miss this role because the Editorial Committee, in its rotating constituency, has been some of the most robust community building opportunities I've ever had, and an amazing group of people all around. They've been an honor to work with. It has felt, during a hard twenty months, like a group of people I could turn to for support and friendship.

At the same time, I am also giddy with anticipation about what Ray Zill, our new incoming Editor, will do for Alki and the communities we serve. She is committed to a journal that strives towards antiracism; she was an editorial board member and then the interim editor for Nebraska Libraries journal, and has been a letterpress artist for about 10 years (most recently under the name Poet Ray Prints). It will be wonderful to step back and observe where she takes our publication. Welcome, Ray! I am so glad you are here!

This issue is traditionally the Conference Issue, and we asked you to engage—critically—with the theme of the WLA annual meeting: "Communities, Conversations, Connections." We asked you to think about how library associations promote critical conversations among individual library staff and library organizations, the role a library association plays in defining library values, and to think on what the critical conversations are that your libraries are having.

You are in for a treat. The theme of critical conversation weaves in and out of articles about staff equity, nonhierarchical mentoring, Black History Month programming, switching between library types, the revisions of an information literacy curriculum, an African American Read-In, and more.

Another (recurrent) critical conversation that I do not want to neglect in the haze of December is all the book challenges our school librarian colleagues across the country are experiencing. From personal experience, I know those very books that are being challenged are the ones our youth need the most. Thank you for what you do; please share your experiences in the next or a future Alki.

As always, I remain inspired by the creativity, compassion, and reflective abilities within our communities. Thank you for everything. 📖

Warmly,
Johanna (she/her/hers)

Johanna Jacobsen Kiciman works at the University of Washington, Tacoma as Coordinator for Research Help and Instruction Librarian. She has recently taken to crocheting chunky blankets and will be your incoming WLA Vice President.

Innovative Possibilities for Black History Month Programming . . . All Year Long: Adapting Student Outreach During COVID-19

By Michelle H. Martin and Emily Ready

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Michelle H. Martin

As a University of Washington iSchool faculty who teaches exclusively in the MLIS program, and almost exclusively youth services courses, I believe in outreach and giving students real-audience writing and community-based projects in my classes.

LIS 563, Cultural History of Children's and Young Adult Literature, has traditionally offered a survey of canonical children's literature (the White canon), starting with early texts like hornbooks and battledores, dipping into Puritan texts, Rationalism, Romanticism, The Golden Age of Children's Literature, and ending with (if there's time) a drive-by introduction to contemporary texts by BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) authors. As a scholar of African American literature, I decided to throw that model out the window. Students can read Peter Hunt's *Children's*

Dr. Michelle H. Martin is the Beverly Cleary Endowed Professor for Children and Youth Services in the Information School at the University of Washington and from 2011-2016 was the inaugural Augusta Baker Endowed Chair in Childhood Literacy at the University of South Carolina. She published *Brown Gold: Milestones of African-American Children's Picture Books, 1845-2002* (Routledge, 2004) and founded *Read-a-Rama* (www.Read-a-Rama.org), a non-profit that uses children's books as the springboard for year-round and summer camp programming.

Emily Ready is a second-year MLIS student at the University of Washington and a student assistant at the Odegaard Undergraduate Library. They have worked in libraries and bookstores and have a passion for reader's advisory, collection development and community outreach. Their cat, Cookie, was in their lap throughout the editing of this article.

A special thanks goes to all of the student contributors to this article: Claudia Baker, Ellen Barker, Rachel Beckham, Sandra Bobman, Madeline Bonner, Rachel Broenkow, Chloe Bryant, Henry Christopher, Joanne Dallas, Karli Cotton, Jennifer DeBaun-Holm, Cristyn Filla, Sydney Geyer, Zoe Holland, Jacqui Howell, Alex King, Courtney Knostman, Seraphim Lee, Rebecca Luxmore, Zoë Maughan, Aireana McDade, Kathryn Miller, Nancy Nightingale, Trevor Oetgen, Diana Palacio, Sarah Patafio, Valerie Peacock, Sydney Powell, Naomi Rosenberg, Melanie Smith, Emily Terada, Caroline Wright.

Literature: An Illustrated History (Oxford University Press, 1995) and get a good survey of the White canon all under one cover. But the particularized history of African American Children's Literature is something I can offer that they will not likely get anywhere else.

Hence, this course begins with Katharine Capshaw and Anna Mae Duane's recent work, *Who Writes for Black Children: African American Children's Literature Before 1900* (University of Minnesota Press, 2017), which relies heavily on archives from the American Antiquarian Society to draw a new, much earlier, timeline for the beginning of the genre than previous surveys espoused. The course also includes primary material like *Clarence and Corinne; or God's Way*, thought to be the first work for children penned by an African American; stereotypical portrayals of African Americans written and illustrated by White authors and illustrators to the detriment of Black characters; Harlem Renaissance texts by authors like Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps; and more contemporary works like Zetta Elliott's *Mother of the Sea*. These materials are supplemented with secondary material from English Studies, including chapters from my book, *Brown Gold: Milestones of African American Children's Picture Books, 1845-2002*; Kate Capshaw's *Children's Literature of the Harlem Renaissance*; as well as critical LIS texts like chapters from Nicole Cooke's *Information Services to Diverse Populations: Developing Culturally Competent Library Professionals*. Additionally, I include TED Talks, interviews, podcasts, and articles to help students consider how this material might be useful in their work as LIS professionals.

To gain a more cohesive pedagogical experience, the students in my Winter 2021 class were required to complete a COVID-safe outreach project in collaboration with Spokane County Library District or Sno-Isle Library, two library systems that responded when I asked for outreach partners. Students began by brainstorming lots of ideas on the discussion boards, and four projects emerged. Three were group projects—two storytimes and a staff professional development—and the fourth the students named “Book Fair,” TikTok-length book talk videos about excellent OwnVoices African American texts. Spokane County Library would then “brand” these and post them on their social media feed during Black History Month and later. The professional development project involved a group of 7 students teaching an hour-long DEAL (Drop Everything and Learn) professional development session to all of the Sno-Isle Youth Services library

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staff on picture books about African American children enjoying nature. The outreach groups have written about their projects and their takeaways from serving Washington libraries in this online environment.

STUDENT-LED PROGRAMMING

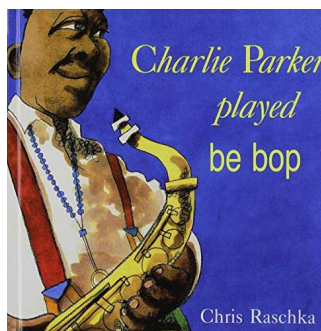
Student voices matter. This next section features students' descriptions of their programs in their own voices, explaining each program's goals, the activities they included, and their reflections on the events.

Connecting Stories & Music - Spokane County Library District

Sydney Geyer, Aireana McDade, Kathryn Miller, Nancy Nightingale

The initial idea for this 30-minute storytime program came from Aireana, who suggested that we feature Black singers or recording artists, to incorporate music into a storytime session. From there, we discussed different genres and options for the program format. While we would have enjoyed exploring more interactive music-making activities; time and technology presented some challenges.

Since the Spokane County Library District (SCLD) collection included several picture books about famous jazz musicians, we decided to focus our attention there. Our program highlighted two Black jazz musicians, Ella Fitzgerald and Charlie Parker. Additionally, we provided a brief history of jazz, read two picture books—Chris Raschka's *Charlie Parker Played Be Bop* and Andrea Davis Pinkney's *Ella Fitzgerald: The Tale of a Vocal Virtuosa*—and led two activities (call-and-response scatting, and drawing what the music sounds like).



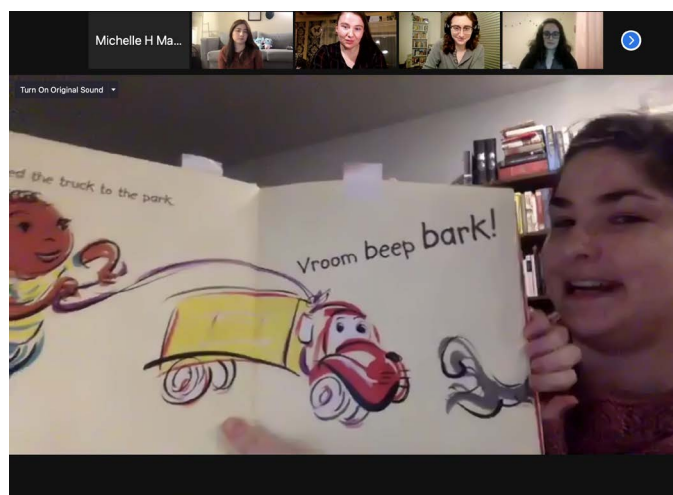
One of our favorite parts of this program was creating our post-program kit titled "Jazz Storytime: An Exploration Kit," which the SCLD staff sent out to the program attendees afterward, providing more information on various Black jazz artists. We created two book lists—one for children and one for adults—curated a musical playlist, and provided links to a do-it-yourself (DIY) musical instruments activity. We decided to create this kit because jazz does not start and end with Charlie Parker and Ella Fitzgerald. With so many more Black jazz artists to celebrate, we figured this kit was a terrific way of encouraging library patrons to continue exploring.

Our biggest takeaway is that a lot of work goes into planning a

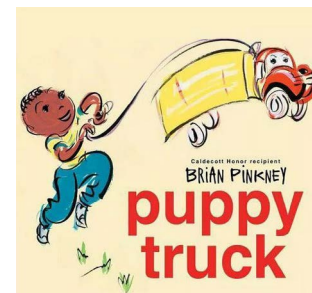
storytime program, especially via Zoom. From selecting a theme, to finding books, developing engaging activities, and troubleshooting any technical issues, storytime programming requires a lot of preparation and careful consideration. During the planning, we wanted to make sure that we provided library patrons with a fun and educational program, where they could walk away saying, "That was so much fun!" and "I want to know more!" Sydney Geyer noted that the event prepared her for future LIS work, whether in public libraries or outside of them: "I expect any LIS work I do to revolve around centering voices often excluded from celebration in the public library space," she said. "[T]he assignment prepared me more generally to consider what it means to thoughtfully incorporate narratives by, for, and about patrons of color."

Happy Huskies Storytime - Spokane County Library District

Rachel Beckham, Daisy Chan, Henry Christopher, Naomi Rosenberg, Zoe Holland



We created a 30-minute virtual storytime with children, between the ages of two and five, and their families. Our storytime celebrated Black History Month and included a variety of activities such as songs, stretches, stories, and a puppet show that showcased Black characters and predominantly Black authors. The program included (though not in this order) "Funga Alafia," a Yoruba welcome song, the reading of Matthew A. Cherry and Vashti Harrison's *Hair Love*, Ezra Jack Keats's *The Snowy Day*, and Brian Pinkney's *Puppy Truck*; stretching to the tune of "Wheels on the Bus" and "Oh Mister Sun"; a popsicle stick puppet show, donning of winter hats; "Peace Like a River," sung and played



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on ukulele; and a concluding South African lullaby, “Thula Baba” (“Hush, Little Child”).

The Zoom platform enabled us to interact with families in a casual setting. We invited both audio and visual interaction. Visual indications of engagement such as nodding or swaying were encouraged more than unmuted singing along due to issues like lag and overlapping audio. This was a fairly new format for SCLD, which began virtual storytimes in January 2020, but we had many chances to ask the library staff for tips and discuss our concerns. Rachel Beckham appreciated the input from SCLD’s library workers during the planning stages of their event. “I think it was a good experience working with the library,” she stated afterwards, “because I could learn from their wisdom on doing virtual events and working with younger children.”

We found it challenging to ensure that our activities were engaging for the children and to make sure that visual displays were clearly viewable. We put emphasis on stretches and easily learnable songs that children could replicate to keep their attention. Another challenge was trying to display cultural content to toddlers in a digestible format. “Working with the public was very energizing and validating because we could immediately see the effect we were having on them,” said Zoe Holland. The amount of engagement from the children brought us the most joy; they were incredibly active and attentive in all of our activities.

Book Fair - Spokane County District Library

Ellen Barker, Sandra Bobman, Rachel Broenkow, Chloe Bryant, Karli Cotton, Cristyn Filla, Alex King, Courtney Knostman, Seraphim Lee, Rebecca Luxmore, Zoë Maughan, Trevor Oetgen, Valerie Peacock, Sydney Powell, Emily Ready, Melanie Smith, Emily Terada, Caroline Wright

Our 18 group members each recorded three short book talks on a variety of titles, ranging from picture books for young children to YA novels and nonfiction. Titles included *Hair Love* by Matthew A. Cherry and illustrated by Vashti Harrison, *Children of Blood and Bone* by Tomi Adeyemi, *Before the Ever After* by Jacqueline Woodson, *All Boys Aren’t Blue* by George M. Johnson, and *Twins* by Varian Johnson and illustrated by Shannon Wright, among others.

We sought to introduce SCLD patrons to OwnVoices texts (those written by “authors who openly share[d] the diverse identity of their main characters”) for children and young adults, emphasizing

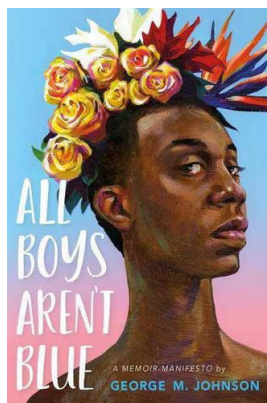
Black authors and illustrators.¹ The library staff gave us background information about the audience and online platform, which allowed us to tailor our content to their needs. Though we created these videos for Black History Month, we knew we would produce more content than the library district could easily feature in a single month of social media posts. We therefore designed book talks to encourage readers to find excellent books by Black creators any time of year. “I am glad that our videos will be posted outside of the month of February,” Emily Ready expressed, “since too often programs celebrating books by Black authors are pigeonholed into Black History Month.”

Our brainstorming and planning relied on online spreadsheets, Zoom meetings, and an active Discord channel where we swapped tips and commiserated about technical difficulties. The group found inspiration in Rudine Sims Bishop’s discussion of books as the mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors that allow readers to see themselves reflected and see into others’ experiences of the world.² We also discussed Patricia Montiel Overall’s and Nicole Cooke’s writing on cultural competence in preparation for the project.^{3,4}

Initially, we found choosing and mastering our recording technologies challenging. We used a variety of hardware and applications: smartphone cameras, webcams, and screen recorders with TikTok, VoiceThread, Panopto, Prezi, Animoto, iMovie, Explain Everything, and AutoCap, among others. The wide variety of apps and technologies allowed for a range of styles and interpretations of the project. Some participants held up a book and spoke directly to the camera. Some flipped through the pages or zoomed in on particular illustrations. Others created slideshows or animations. Some creators set their book talks to music, and some preferred voice only. The run time ranged from thirty seconds to three minutes, averaging just over a minute. Early on, we decided to include captions in all videos for maximum accessibility.

We were especially inspired by “BookTok” videos on the TikTok platform, wherein creators review and recommend books to their followers. Participants who chose to create BookTok videos recommended titles with short, snappy reviews and fun caption fonts, transitions, and background music to capture viewers’ attention. We were eager to contribute in our own way to libraries’ use of TikTok as an outreach platform for their communities and especially for their young patrons.

At the time of this writing, we are eagerly awaiting the launch of the collected book talks on SCLD’s social media pages (such as their Twitter page, @SpCoLibraryDist) and the community’s response. So far, the payoff has been getting to celebrate so many amazing stories and OwnVoices authors and illustrators—and discovering new reads through each other’s book talks. Ellen Barker, who plans to work in public libraries in the future, said that as a result of the Book Fair project she will “be cognizant of how my



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library is promoting Black authors and other POC.” This project emphasized to us the importance of promoting stories written by Black creators for Black readers, something we will bring with us into our future LIS careers.

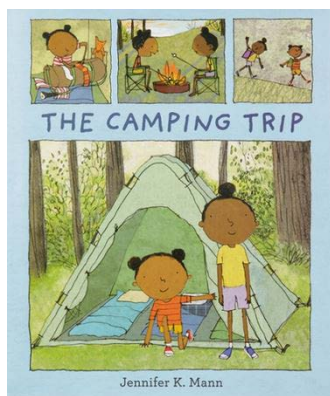
DEAL (Drop Everything and Learn) - Sno-Isle Public Library

Claudia Baker, Madeline Bonner, Joanne Dallas, Jennifer DeBaun-Holm, Jacqui Howell, Diana Palacio, Sarah Patafio

Our group created a presentation that supported increased engagement of Black children in nature. We sought to provide some professional development for the Sno-Isle library staff and offer a variety of resources that would make it easy for them to

modify their collections and services to be more representative and inclusive of people of color in nature. These resources included book recommendations, research that supported the need for more diversity and inclusion in books about the outdoors, activity ideas that complemented the themes and content of our picture books, and links to resources in the Sno-Isle service area to help users easily locate affordable ways to access nature near them. At the request of the youth services staff, we accommodated the current limitations of COVID and made the activities more equitable by making content easy to share via social media/email and activities easy to complete remotely using recycled or found items.

Books shared included *The Camping Trip* by Jennifer K. Mann, *C is For Country* by Little Nas X, *Gator, Gator, Gator* by Daniel Bernstrom, *The Vast Wonder of the World* by Mélina Mangal, & Luisa Uribe, *Magnificent Homespun Brown* by Samara Cole Doyon and Kaylani Juanita, as well as a large list of book recommendations that we divided into categories and shared in a Google Drive with the library staff. Our list also specified which titles were OwnVoices and which were written by non-Black writers.



“I gained a better understanding of the thought that goes into children's programming. I also got experience presenting in a professional setting. This [sort of hands-on learning as part of curriculum] is important to me because I don't think I would have gotten the opportunity to do something like this otherwise.”

– Diana Palacio

We interacted with participants through discussions in which they were encouraged to unmute and share in the chat, as well as through breakout rooms. Although technology presented several challenges such as our being unable to configure our own breakout rooms, we really enjoyed hearing the library staffs' enthusiastic discussions of spending time outside and their ideas for pairing activities with the books during circle time. We also loved the energy and excitement that our presentation generated. In our Google Survey, the one suggestion for improvement was more time for discussion.

A takeaway for us was the importance of outreach. Library staff are hungry to learn about books that feature Black children.

They were surprised by some of the research we presented, especially the backlash from country fans against Lil Nas X, including boycotting Wrangler Jeans following the brand's collaboration with the rapper.⁵ This response from country music fans to Lil Nas X follows the pattern of historical cultural erasure of African Americans by both country music and the American frontier era.

Finally, the youth services staff were surprised by our research that disclosed how Girl Scouts desegregated twenty years before the Boy Scouts. Both groups were segregated until the 1950s and 1970s respectively, creating a barrier for Black children to access the outdoors. It was exciting to be involved in these discussions with a group of experienced professionals. We loved how their brainstorming generated great ideas to bring books about African Americans enjoying nature to their patrons. A major takeaway amongst group members was the importance of children's literature portraying Black kids in nature, and our roles as future librarians in encouraging patrons to see themselves enjoying the outdoors. “Picture books in particular are an important means through which a lot of children explore the world, and picture books featuring Black people interacting with nature are important because they allow Black children to see themselves having immersive experiences with the natural world,” said Madeline Bonner.

CONCLUSION

The importance of these four projects that 35 students dreamed up, planned, and implemented within a ten-week quarter is not that

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From Support to Solidarity: Recognizing the Nonhierarchical Mentoring Environment Within

by Bridgette Flamenco, Wendy Lee Spaček, and Erin A. Sulla

The 2021 Washington Library Association (WLA) Conference's shift from in-person to virtual was a decision that felt appropriate and not at all surprising, given the uncertainty surrounding large in-person events due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. We, a group of three early-career librarians at Central Washington University (CWU), had been eager to set off on a mini road trip together to bond, gain insight into the field of librarianship, and network with our peers at other institutions. When the conference changed to a virtual format, we decided to make a collaborative document to share our notes on the conference sessions, live-text each other during sessions, and to meet up in the evening after the conference to have dinner, reflect, and socialize.

Although we hold different positions at the CWU Libraries, our duties overlap and interconnect. Bridgette Flamenco is the ACRL Diversity Resident whose duties align closely with that of a non-tenure track research and instruction librarian. She is the library liaison to the Law and Justice and Political Science departments. Her two-year ACRL residency also requires her to complete a project related to first generation students at CWU. Wendy Lee Spaček is the Arts & Humanities Librarian, which is a tenure-track faculty position. Her primary duties include liaising with eight departments in the Arts & Humanities, and providing research support, instruction, and collection development. Erin Sulla is CWU's First Year & Transfer Experience Librarian, which is a tenure-track faculty position. Along with research and instruction duties, she collaborates with units across campus to support incoming students at CWU.



Image courtesy of authors. From left to right: Wendy, Bridgette, and Erin.

Each of us arrived on campus and began our positions within a few months of one another, and we instantly connected professionally based on shared interests in critical information literacy and librarianship, and the fact that we are all recent MLS graduates and early-career librarians. We also connected personally based on our worldviews, relatively similar age, shared humor, identities as members of systemically oppressed groups (Bridgette as BIPOC, Erin and Wendy as LGBTQ+), and complementary personalities. Almost immediately after meeting we began communicating in various formats both in and out of work and connecting around our professional and personal lives.

While the three of us were not able to fulfil our dream of a little road trip over the mountains together, we still found WLA's virtual sessions enlightening. One session in particular left us feeling quite inspired: "Nonhierarchical Mentoring to Disrupt the System!

Creating Communities of Solidarity within the Library," presented by Nicole Gustaven, Shayna Pekala, and Anthony Tardiff. The contributors focused on explaining the creation and function of a nonhierarchical mentoring group at Gonzaga University's Foley Library. An interest in mentoring as a concept, especially in tandem with nonhierarchical power structures, motivated us to attend the session. As explained in the panel, nonhierarchical mentoring is "formed by similarly situated peers" and can be established through "solidarity in difficult times [and] among people with similar experiences."¹ While attending the session, we all immediately recognized the parallels between our budding relationship and the relationships of the presenting librarians. As we all remarked on the similarities to each other on our shared text thread and our shared document, we came to realize that we had already begun to form our own nonhierarchical mentoring group at our institution.

At the Central Washington University Libraries, Bridgette Flamenco is the ACRL Diversity Resident, Wendy Lee Spaček is the Arts & Humanities Librarian, and Erin A. Sulla is the First Year & Transfer Experience Librarian. The three of them are passionate about critical librarianship and MarioKart.

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Our relationship came together in part based on solidarity in difficult times: the major life transitions of graduating, beginning a career, moving to a totally new place, and acclimating to a new work environment—all during a global pandemic. We all agreed that, though we felt palpable warmth and welcome from our other CWU colleagues, we felt a certain sense of understanding, solidarity, and support within our cohort that has been extremely important in easing the difficulty of these life and career transitions. We also recognized that we had organically established a community of care between

us which the presenters described. The non-judgmental tone of our interactions fit perfectly into the presenter's concept of nonhierarchical mentoring; as new faculty adjusting to the same new environment, this lateral support created a community of care and cultivated personal and professional respect within our group. Our positions share and differ in responsibilities, but we unite over the common factor of being new to our positions and to our field. We all also entered CWU from three large R1 institutions; this transition to a smaller public university required us to reconsider our previous notions of instruction, collection development, and research support. Despite our differing roles and varying backgrounds, we are guided by our shared dedication to common goals like equity in librarianship and critical information literacy. Our group enables us to bridge our different experiences, synthesize our perspectives on the field of LIS, and ask questions and brainstorm ideas without any pressure on us or our roles and professional standing at the library. Since attending the panel, we have been prompted to continue to nurture our relationships and are furthering our shared and individual goals through supportive peer mentoring.

The insights we gained while attending the panel session led us to write this reflection and contribute to the discourse surrounding how library associations promote critical conversations and build community within libraries. Would we have been able to identify our group dynamic for what it was and what it could be? Maybe or maybe not, but it is certain that attending this panel session helped us to recognize the full potential of the informal support system we had already intuitively created. It is in fact appropriate that our first project together be a reflection on the WLA Conference, because it was the conference that gave us our first real opportunity to connect and collaborate. Moving forward, we will take what we learned in the WLA session and incorporate some of the techniques described by the presenting librarians with the goal of strengthening our peer mentoring relationship to maximize

“As new faculty adjusting to the same new environment, this lateral support created a community of care and cultivated personal and professional respect within our group.”

the community of care we are creating. We will implement more structure into our group, which we have affectionately dubbed

“The Cult of Stacks and Snacks,” by establishing monthly meetings, preferably alongside a few sweet treats, to discuss instruction and projects. We will offer one another intentional support by observing each other in instruction sessions, giving feedback on lesson plans and syllabi, co-creating scholarship, working together to plan courses, and connecting each other to campus and community networks. As we continue to adjust to this new environment,

our dedication to this newly codified nonhierarchical mentoring group will provide a vital space for developing a sense of solidarity across our positions and strengthening our library cohort. 📖

NOTES

1 Nicole Gustaven, Shayna Pekala, and Anthony Tardiff, “Nonhierarchical Mentoring to Disrupt the System! Creating Communities of Solidarity within the Library,” presentation by Nicole Gustaven, Shayna Pekala, and Anthony Tardiff, WLA Conference, September 30–October 2, 2021.

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Shape-Shifting: Personal and Career Strategies for Moving Fluidly Between Library Types

by Ann Glusker

INTRODUCTION

It took me two years to get my first “permanent” librarian job after graduate school, despite a lot of previous career experience, and a hefty dose of privilege. During my MLIS study, I had positioned myself, through coursework and fieldwork choices, to be a viable candidate for jobs in various library types (given Seattle’s oversaturated job market). Academic, medical, public, special—I would just let the fates (or hiring managers!) decide. My goal was to get the job, and then be like all those long-term librarians I saw, and sit in my librarian chair and never leave. As it turned out, within 10 years from starting that first librarian job, I held four different positions, in four different types of libraries. Each time I took the new job, I thought, “This is the one! I will retire from here!” But three times, I’ve decided to take the leap to a different setting.

Interestingly, each transition has aroused deep suspicion among friends and colleagues. “You are leaving a good librarian job? Why would anyone in their right mind do that?” In this article I hope to turn the question around, and ask, why would anyone not at least consider changing jobs, and even library types (what I am calling a library-type-shift), if it could mean better work-life harmony, a better fit with the job, and/or a more positive work environment?

While we don’t all have the circumstances or privilege that would let us consider rocking our career or financial boats, a library-type-shift may be more possible than many of us think. It seems that changing library types is becoming more common, and there are many examples beyond my own. If you’d like to check out a range of examples, read the excellent book *Career Transitions for Librarians: Proven Strategies for Moving to Another Type of Library*.¹ It offers almost 40 case studies and reflections, through interviews,

conversations, and authored pieces, which discuss virtually any library transition imaginable. It is also a treasure trove of ideas on what library types can be explored beyond the academic, medical, public, and special categories shown in Figure 1.

This article provides information on getting started, a discussion of planned versus unplanned library-type-shifts (including issues related to low morale settings), how to tell your story on the job interview circuit, and how to acclimatize to your new setting. (A note: while I will focus more on librarianship given experience, many of these suggestions apply to other library positions as well).

Figure 1

Some Library Types (consider also the size and user base of each!)	
	Academic
	School
	Public
	Special
	Corporate
	Medical
	Law/Legal
	Governmental

GETTING STARTED

The process of getting started, if you have the luxury of time to plan and feel ready to consider broader options, really involves an open-minded self-exploration. In many library settings—especially larger ones—there are a range of roles in which you might prosper, even if you might not at first believe you’d enjoy different library types. While we tend to characterize library types in our minds, a given position listing may be a better indicator of what the job will be like, and can help you see yourself in it. This means that the first step is

Ann Glusker is the librarian for sociology, demography, public policy and quantitative research at the University of California, Berkeley. Before moving to Berkeley in 2019, she lived in her native Philadelphia, where she was a career counselor at the University of Pennsylvania, then in Seattle for 25 years, where she got her MLIS at the University of Washington iSchool, and held various jobs around town. Her recent professional interests are related to data literacy for first generation college students and for library workers, library staff morale, mid-career librarian career issues, and evidence synthesis support for researchers in the social sciences. She is a long-time singer of medieval and renaissance music, a murder mystery fanatic, and a Janeite, currently participating in “Synchronous Emma”.

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being open to listings you might not normally read, since starting to think about roles rather than library types can be a helpful shift in perspective. Remember that once you've done one library-type-shift, you are better set up to do another, if the need or interest arises! Even if you feel your job security is iron-clad, it's still not a bad idea to have a sense of your Plan B.

In considering a move to another type of library, you may want to examine the questions about library types, your own work history,

style, values, and needs related to the different library types. The following questions might be a useful place to start (see Figure 2).

The question of what career advancement looks like in a new setting, and whether you care, may arise. You may never want to go into administration/management, preferring to do "direct work." Either is fine if they are the best fit for you. However, in some settings—mainly academia—the job requirements include engaging in a career ladder, requiring certain levels and types of professional activity at each stage. Consider this when thinking through library types that might be a fit for you.

Figure 2

Questions for Considering a Library-Type-Shift

About different library types and settings:

- What are the differences between the two settings you are considering? Will factors such as pay, job duties, hours, and other aspects of the new setting be a fit for you and your needs?
- Does urban-rural location play a part?
- How is a tight market limiting, or motivating?
- What do employers from each setting look for/value?
- What issues or concerns might you want to prepare for that relate to your new setting? For example, are there different patron codes of conduct, different organizational missions, different hiring structures for librarians and library staff, etc., or different service patterns depending on user groups?
- What role does management play in the library settings you are considering?
- What tech skills are needed?
- Does service provision/style/policy/offerings/day-to-day life differ between settings?
- What does job security look like? Consider: unions, tenure, funding streams, etc...
- What are the opportunities for professional development?
- Are there differences in salary and benefits?
- What information do you need to decide if you'd like a different kind of setting?

About your own values and goals:

- How much does setting/patron type matter to you?
- What is your tolerance for risk?
- Is job change comfortable for you in general?
- Could you achieve your career goals in a setting that's different from your current one?
- How would you work around external constraints such as family needs, desired location, financial situation, and the like if a great job was offered to you?
- What have you always wanted to learn that you might be able to do elsewhere? Are there learning opportunities you feel drawn to?
- Do you have to leave your current employer to find a better job situation, or can you do that from within the system you already are a part of?
- What skills and experience can you offer to an employer of a different library type that would fit their needs?

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PLANNED VS. UNPLANNED LIBRARY-TYPE-SHIFTS:

Your reason for leaving your current job matters in considering whether a library-type-shift is a fit for you. Career Transitions for Librarians tends to center around the pull factors of shifting library types: what might appeal more about a new setting, how a new setting may be a better career choice, and so on.² However, the decision to change library jobs can also come as a response to workplace stresses or downright abusive work climates, and may include anxiety-inducing risk. Library jobs thought to be secure can evaporate, meaning that many library workers are job-seeking while in shock from sudden job loss.

A planned library-type shift may arise for numerous reasons. It may be that you have been lucky enough to have hit the best library type for you with your first job. But often, first jobs are a “take what we can get” situation and then sitting back a breather at the top of that first plateau. It makes sense that, after a few months or years, one might take stock and think about next steps, dream jobs, career goals, and the like. Sometimes the library type you thought you’d love isn’t working as well as you hoped; sometimes, you might have wanted a different type all along.

In this case, you’ll want to consider how to get experience in or about the desired library type, how to build networks to connect to that type, and how to build skills and experiences in your current setting so that you’ll be attractive to an employer in the new setting. While getting a part-time job might be a way to explore a new skill set, this technique isn’t usually practical, and can take a heavy toll. Volunteering and internships are what many aspiring librarians will do to get a foot in the door, and while they are great ways to meet people and get experience, once again not everyone can take the time or money for these opportunities (let alone the question of whether the volunteer work being done should be

compensated). In addition, this puts the burden on the job seeker, not the employer.

If these options are not viable, you can still make connections through creating a community of support. Most librarians are happy to help as they can, whether through formal mentoring or less formal informational meetings or interviews. If you can’t find a connection by asking people in your own library (or if you don’t want to for privacy reasons), check out topic-specific list-servs, webinars, conferences, and other offerings from the professional associations and their local chapters in the library type you’re interested in. Continuing education can be an advantage both in making these connections and on a resume to show your commitment to transitioning to the new library type, but be sure (ideally by checking in with people in those settings) that you are targeting those in the way that hiring managers want to see. Another idea is to look for cross-type collaboration—as part of your current position, could you collaborate with a librarian in your desired library type on a project? As you explore, always have a resume and the names of references ready to go—sometimes the opportunity you want can come and go quickly, and you don’t want to miss it for lack of a document! Last but not least, expect this process to take time.

Unplanned shifts are many magnitudes more difficult. Suddenly scrambling for a job

after an unexpected layoff announcement (devastatingly familiar in the age of COVID), or having to find the inner strength to believe in oneself rather than what we have been told about our work in a toxic setting, and leave “a good job” for the unknown, can be extremely disorienting at best. And when you are in shock, it becomes impossible to take steps forward. The challenges of job hunting in these and similar situations are manifold, but it

“ Shifting from one library type to another can be an exciting adventure and a reinvigoration of a career path that has stagnated, or it can be a forced leap into the unknown which brings challenge and disorientation—or a mix of both. Whether planned and desired, or unplanned due to job loss or problematic working conditions, the approaches to making a fluid library-type-shift include building a community of support and engaging with the new library type in order to show the value of your transferable skills to employers.”

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is especially difficult to job hunt when feeling diminished by workplace dysfunctions. Unplanned job searches can be experiences of crushing uncertainty and disappointment.

The emotional underpinnings of any unplanned job search need to be considered and (if possible), examined, in order to have a chance at a better job and workplace fit, and a better life, regardless of the library type. If you have not yet read Kaetrena Davis Kendrick's seminal article, "The Low Morale Experience of Academic Librarians: A Phenomenological Study", run-do-not-walk to find it and read it³. Kendrick researches and writes about the phenomenon of low morale among librarians in various settings, and the additional burdens of systemic racism on many library workers. In addition, Kendrick's article, "Leaving the Low Morale Experience: A Qualitative Study," focuses on librarians' experiences of leaving low morale settings, and provides insight and validation as to what many of us experience in such unplanned career- and library-type shifts.⁴ Many library workers choose to leave the library world altogether due to their long-term experiences in low-morale settings.

Kendrick's work shows that low morale is insidious and common, and taken with workplace stress in general can be expected to have negative psychological and physical effects; finding a job that turns these processes around requires healing first. Those of us who are burned out might laugh bitterly at this—who has time, and how ridiculous anyway! But I believe it's of paramount importance to put yourself and your health first if at all possible, so that you have the capacity to resist the temptation of a job that looks good but will drag you down, and to set boundaries that will further protect you in future.

“To say that the transition was difficult would be an understatement. I struggled, confused as to why on earth I had chosen this new path and fearful that I would never, ever be successful at it. I doubted my sanity and choice-making ability, and, ultimately, I questioned whether or not I had made the right career move. Ten months later, the waters are calmer, the job itself has become easier, and I have a much better perspective on how and why I made the change.”

– Holland Kessinger



Photo by [Jackson Douglas on Unsplash](#)

In addition to the emotional work of moving forward with an unplanned library-type-shift, in any job insecurity or unemployment there is often also a sense of urgency in the search to be aware of as you navigate the process. You can still do some of the things suggested for a planned shift—check out professional association content and list-servs, find information and support from librarians in the library type you want to shift to, and rework your own resume and cover letter to target the new setting. Half the battle will be projecting confidence that you can function successfully in the new setting and add value to the organization, and the other half is making the argument that the move you are proposing makes sense organically as part of your own career story.

TELLING YOUR STORY

“This is the part of the story where I cry,” says Holland Kessinger in an interview from *Career Transitions for Librarians*. “Job searching is intimidating and depressing and makes you feel like all of your hard work

has been for naught, as every available position requires a certain specialty or knowledge that you don't have.”⁵ I am here to tell you that in my experience this is completely true—job searching can be a really tough process. Serendipity happens, but mostly it's a slog, and takes a lot of time (and the completion of many applications) to get even one interview. Changing library types can make you feel like you're back at the beginning, looking for a first job.

My suggestion to ease this struggle is to do some advance work to create your narrative or story. If you can quickly, as in an elevator pitch, present the core of who you are as a library worker, what you can offer the new setting, and why you want to change library types, you have internalized

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Figure 3

COVER LETTER- Things I said in my letter, to state again in interview	ADJECTIVES- Three adjectives that describe me	DATABASES- Relevant to topics in job, favorites and why, comparison, what kinds of questions each is best for	DIVERSITY- Activities that show my commitment, organizational values, trainings, personal experiences	TRAININGS/ INSTRUCTION - Examples
1.	1.	1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.	2.	2.
3.	3.	3.	3.	3.
4.		4.	4.	4.
5.		5.		
COLLABORATION - Examples within library, with other libraries, with community, etc.	LEADERSHIP - Examples, formal or informal	PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT - Courses taken, conferences, committee work, skill building, etc.	INNOVATION - Changes I made that were original and created impact	VISION - Examples of my vision and how I implemented it (for a service, process, organization-wide, etc.)
1.	1.	1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.	2.	2.
3.	3.	3.	3.	3.
4.	4.	4.	4.	4.

your narrative/story/journey/whatever you want to call it. You are seeing your career as an ongoing narrative, with twists and turns, and you are helping your audience (potential employers) see it this way too. This “storytelling” makes the reasons for past changes and current desired position concrete, and shows how they fit into a cohesive whole. Once the story is understood and felt, the career process (cover letters, interviewing, networking, seeking positions) can carry forward more effectively—and with a personal authenticity that can be compelling.

As you think about engaging in this process, you may want to take a look at what I call my “Interview Cheat Sheet”. I created it for my public library interviews, and have adjusted it setting by setting, and job by job, ever since. Perhaps filling it out will help you present your story more fully; even better, it will mean that you won’t have to suddenly think of three adjectives to describe yourself as you’re sitting in the job interview. The link is available in the Career Resources Section below; Figure 3 shows the first page of three.

SEARCHING, FINDING, GETTING, ARRIVING

Oh, the job search! The delightful details of shaping resumes, constructing cover letters, preparing for interviews, finding positions to apply for, and more! OK, not really, but here are a few strategies and resources to consider, some of which are also

mentioned above. Also, there are excellent ideas for pulling some of this together in both the advice interviewees give in Career Transitions for Librarians, and in the “Further Reading” list below.

Strategies and Readiness

- Make sure your resume, a generic cover letter (to be tailored later) and interviewing skills are totally up to date—always! You will customize these to each job listing, but don’t want to start from scratch!
- Keeping your professional social media accounts up to date is also important (especially LinkedIn).
- Keep up with your professional development and training opportunities; there are many that are free (or, available through your library—for example, many public libraries have LinkedIn Learning). Stretch yourself so that you can demonstrate that you can learn new things and adapt, and also create learning goals.
- Check out the “transferable skills” section of the “Further Reading Document;” how do they apply to you? Are there any you should be buffing up now?

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- Find a mentor, network, volunteer, join a professional association you might not otherwise have considered.
- Titles matter: try and figure out the language that the new library-type uses to describe your qualifications; e.g., cataloger vs. taxonomer. Functional resumes can be a way to do this.

Career Resources

- Ann Glusker's [Interview Cheat Sheet](#) (from Figure 3)
- Social Media—LinkedIn and Twitter (and some targeted Facebook groups) have listings and advice; also try [Reddit](#).
- INALJ.com—this site started as “I Need a Library Job;” it has state-specific listings, an amazing list of job titles, and is a great starting place for ideas about roles you might not have considered yet.
- Check listings from state and local library associations, employers of interest, municipal and other government listings, other professional associations.
- Sign up for related listservs! And set up RSS feeds and alerts.
- Don't forget to check more generic job search sites such as Indeed.com—you never know what might crop up!

In many cases, the career services office of the institutions where you got your degrees (undergraduate, masters) will be glad to help with some of the position search strategies, resume and cover letter creation, and interview prep. For example, I went to the University of Washington's iSchool in Seattle, and am really impressed by their workshop recordings (which you don't have to be an alum to access).⁶

Finally—you searched, you found, and you got your job in a new library type—congratulations! What about starting your new job? The people you work with make a huge difference, and I continually lament that we don't do more to prepare students for actual workplaces and how to navigate them. I still avidly read the advice columns by Roxane Gay (“Work Friend”, in *The New York Times*), Karla Miller (“Work Advice”, in *The Washington Post*), and Alison Green ([Askamanager.org](#)) for suggestions about this. In terms of the library-type-shift, as you explore the settings you're applying to, consider aspects such as management styles and support for professional development. In the early work my colleagues at UC Berkeley and I are doing on the morale of library staff (as opposed to librarians), having a supportive and flexible manager is one of

the main foundations for high morale. In addition, a workplace that respects all workers equally, with low levels of librarian/staff divide, also is a crucial aspect of high morale.⁷ Whatever the library type, it makes sense to seek out settings which have these healthier relationships, boundaries and support of all staff.



Photo by [Roger Bradshaw](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Additionally, it is exhausting to start a new job, especially if it's in a library type that's new to you. You meet many new people at one time, who will be important to your future, but you don't know in which ways yet. You are making many first impressions every day, but even if you are an extrovert, there's only so much perkiness to be had (and this was before the pandemic). You need to understand the hierarchies and policies in the new setting, but there may be a lot of them, and you may get conflicting reports of what they mean. You may feel that you aren't good at your day to day work anymore, and aren't sure you will be, because you are absorbing so much. Give yourself a lot of slack, and don't make any decisions for a year, if you have even an inkling it might work out. To revisit Holland Kessinger's experience when she made a planned library-type-shift from art museum librarian to public library teen services librarian:

“To say that the transition was difficult would be an understatement. I struggled, confused as to why on earth I had chosen this new path and fearful that I would never, ever be successful at it. I doubted my sanity and choice-making ability, and, ultimately, I questioned whether or not I had made the right career move. Ten months later, the waters are calmer, the job itself has become easier, and I have a much better perspective on how and why I made the change.”⁸

Remember also that employers can and should be making sure that the transitions into new roles are smooth and supportive--the burden doesn't always have to fall on the future employee. Organizations, and supervisors in particular, should welcome new employees by having defined onboarding procedures and resources, setting up networking meetings for the new staff person with coworkers and other staff library-wide, giving help with personal adjustments such as finding housing, and checking in often about how both work and personal transitions are going. If this isn't happening naturally in your new position, it's fine to seek out support!

CONCLUSION

Shifting from one library type to another can be an exciting adventure and a reinvigoration of a career path that has stagnated,

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or it can be a forced leap into the unknown which brings challenge and disorientation—or a mix of both. Whether planned and desired, or unplanned due to job loss or problematic working conditions, the approaches to making a fluid library-type-shift include building a community of support and engaging with the new library type in order to show the value of your transferable skills to employers. However, above all, first for yourself and then for prospective interviewers, it's essential to craft a storyline which can create sense and meaning of your journey, and indicate desired next steps. Library workers may believe that they must stay within the structures they find themselves in, but self-advocacy and reflection, and a broader view of career paths may change this perspective. For any of you considering taking the leap across the library-type-gap, I send you all my best wishes for a successful application and a smooth transition!

FURTHER READING

Please feel free to explore [this list of online material](#) about library type shifts. 📖

NOTES

1 Davis Erin Anderson and Raymond Pun (eds.), *Career Transitions for Librarians: Proven Strategies for Moving to Another Type of Library* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016).

2 Anderson and Pun.

3 Kaetrena Davis Kendrick, "The Low-Morale Experience of Academic Librarians: A Phenomenological Study," *Journal of Library Administration* 57, no. 8 (2017): 846-878.

4 Kaetrena Davis Kendrick, "Leaving the Low Morale Experience: A Qualitative Study," *Alki: The Washington Library Association Journal* 37, no. 2 (2021): 9-24.

5 Anderson and Pun, 91.

6 "Workshop Recordings." University of Washington iSchool, Career Services. Last accessed September 18, 2021. <https://ischool.uw.edu/advising-support/career-services/recorded-sessions>.

7 Ann Glusker, Bonita Dyess, Celia Emmelhainz, and Natalia Estrada, "Library Staff Morale in the Academic Hierarchy," UC Berkeley Library, deposited April 4, 2021. Last accessed September 18, 2021. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/30790731>

8 Anderson and Pun, 89.

their programs and book talks have made a lasting impact on the field or on the community, though they may well have had such impact. Rather, it's that these students, who are heading for LIS professions within three months to two years, have concrete ideas about how to plan programming that centers community. They understand to begin by asking how they can best enrich the lives of children, teens and families in their communities, and how their programming can embrace the work of underrepresented authors and scholars to bring greater awareness and equity into libraries and other LIS spaces.

Students appreciated the opportunity to work with real libraries and patrons as part of their class experience. "I gained a better understanding of the thought that goes into children's programming. I also got experience presenting in a professional setting," said Diana Palacio. "This is important to me because I don't think I would have gotten the opportunity to do something like this otherwise." 📖

NOTES

1 #WeNeedDiverseBooks. "Why #WeNeedDiverseBooks is no longer using the term #OwnVoices." 6 June 2021.

2 Rudine Sims Bishop, "Mirrors, Windows and Sliding Glass Doors," *Multicultural Literacy, Reading is Fundamental* (2015). (<https://scenicregional.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Mirrors-Windows-and-Sliding-Glass-Doors.pdf>)

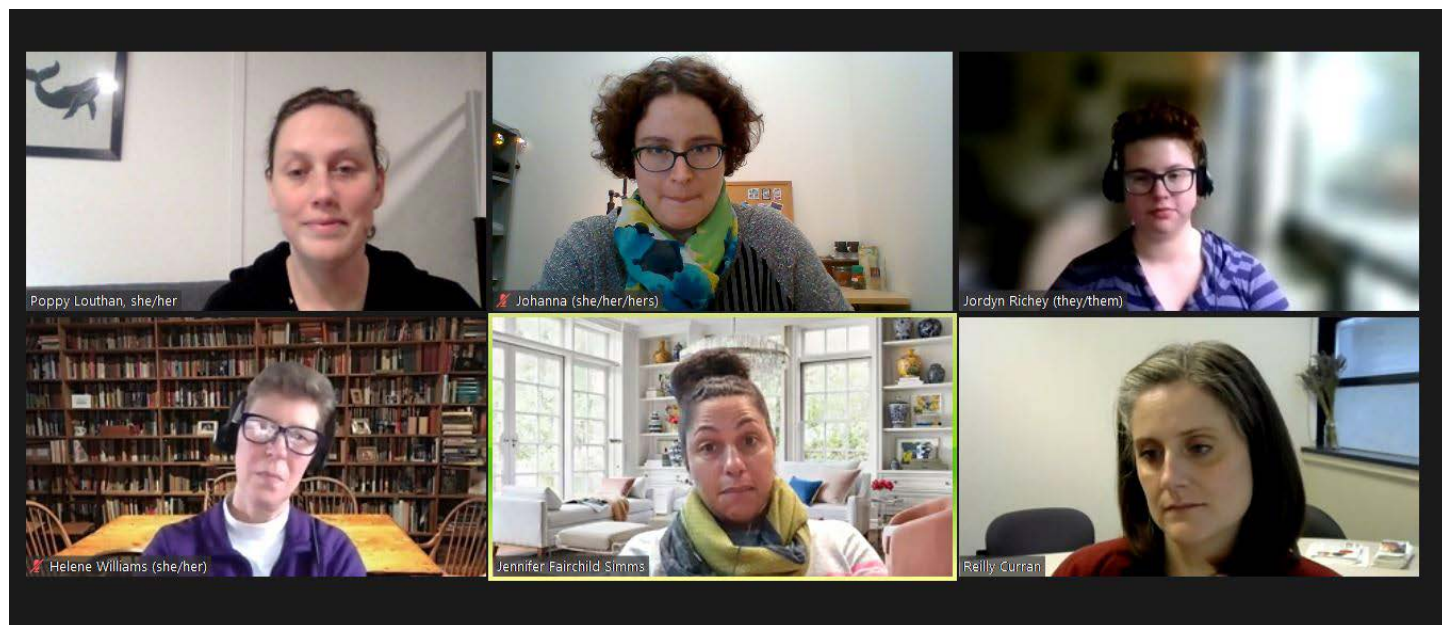
3 Patricia Montiel Overall, "Cultural Competence: A Conceptual Framework for Library and Information Science Professionals," *The Library Quarterly* (Chicago) 79, no. 2 (2009): 175-204.

4 Nicole A Cooke, *Information Services to Diverse Populations: Developing Culturally Competent Library Professionals*. Library and Information Science Text Series. Englewood: Libraries Unlimited, 2016.

5 Allegra Frank, "Lil Nas X and Wrangler Collaborated on a Clothing Line. Some Wrangler Customers Aren't Having it," *Vox.*, accessed November 13, 2021, <https://www.vox.com/culture/2019/5/23/18636279/lil-nas-x-wrangler-collection-prices-backlash>.

Library Crossovers: A Conversation

by Reilly Curran, Jennifer Fairchild Simms, Johanna Jacobsen Kiciman, Poppy Louthan, Jordyn Richey, and Helene Williams



Screenshot courtesy of the authors

In this issue, Ann Glusker highlights the importance of transferable skills in switching between library types. At the same time, she creates a space of empathy and understanding for *just how hard it can be* to switch jobs. It takes hard work to build new relationships and understand a new work culture. This difficulty can be exacerbated by leaving a toxic work environment or overcoming a layoff.

This conversation between Reilly Curran, Jennifer Fairchild Simms, Johanna Jacobsen Kiciman, Poppy Louthan, Jordyn Richey, and Helene Williams, dialogues with some of the issues Glusker raises. It is complementary to Glusker's observations, and, we hope, helps also normalize the experience of switching between library types within our field. It is important to draw attention to the benefits, both for individuals and the institutions that they join.

We—a group of library workers representing academic, public, school and special libraries—met on a Thursday afternoon via Zoom, all a bit tired from a long day, but excited to meet and to engage. Our conversation is reproduced here, and we hope that it is as enjoyable to read as it was to hold the conversation in the first place. If you want to hone in on particular areas of interest, please feel free to make use of the bolded headings as a guide.

A CONVERSATION: 10/14/2021

Introductions

Johanna (she/her/hers) (University of Washington Tacoma Library): Alright, well I'm really excited to be here today in this space. We've published several conversations in *Alki* over the past two years, which are meant as dynamic explorations of subjects that are relevant in our LIS world. And today we're going to be talking about switching between library types.

Everyone [...] here has had an experience moving between library types and I'm really excited to explore what worked, what didn't, what tools were available, what structural issues were getting in the way. And so we'll go around [...] and introduce ourselves.]

My name is Johanna Jacobsen Kiciman, I use she/her pronouns, I am the coordinator for Research Help at the University of Washington, Tacoma. So I'm at a four year academic university right now that [...] resembles a community college in many of the ways that we operate. Before this, I was a research assistant at Seattle Central College, so I have spent time at a community college as well. I will pass it off to Jennifer.

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Jennifer Fairchild Simms (University of British Columbia): My name is Jennifer Fairchild Simms, and I recently became the Head of the Education Library at the University of British Columbia in Canada. Before joining UBC, I was with the King County Library System for 12 years as a Teen Services Librarian and most recently an Adult Services Librarian. I just started at UBC in June.

Poppy Louthan, she/her (Eton School, Bellevue): I'm Poppy Louthan and I use she/her pronouns. I work at an independent school in Bellevue, Washington, which is right outside of Seattle. Before that I was a youth services public librarian in Sacramento, California [working with patrons] from infancy up to 13. I also teach adjunct classes for Syracuse University iSchool.

Reilly Curran (Washington Talking Book & Braille Library, Seattle): My name is Reilly Curran, she/her pronouns and I just started working at the Washington Talking Book & Braille Library. I started in April so it's still new for me [...]. Before that I worked for six years at Seattle University as a Research Services Librarian and Outreach Specialist.

Jordyn Richey (they/them) (Sno-Isles Libraries): I am Jordyn Richey, they/them pronouns. I'm currently a Collection Development Librarian with Sno-Isle Libraries in Washington state. Before that I was in youth services within the same library system, but before that I was a librarian at an education library at an art museum.

Helene Williams (University of Washington Information School): Thank you [...] Johanna for pulling us all together, this is great. I have a lot in common with every one of you, partly because you have all been my students. I'm Helene Williams, she/her pronouns and I'm a teaching professor at University of Washington Information School and that's the intersection I have with each of you. I have also worked in public libraries in children and youth services, and I've worked in community college libraries. I've worked in small, active, liberal arts college libraries, and huge R1 libraries. So I know a little bit about what all of you are doing, especially making those transitions. I'm really looking forward to hearing what we could do to prepare people. Or how that transition is going, especially for

those of you for whom this is very new. This is exciting. to catch you right on the cusp.

Decisions to Switch

Johanna: [...] I feel like the question sounds innocuous but asking—'why did you decide to switch between library types?'—may be far from innocuous and I think might unearth a number of bigger issues in the field. But I'm curious why you all decided to switch between libraries.

“I am a huge believer that everything that you do is building your skill set; it doesn't matter if it's in retail, it doesn't matter if it's because you're running a Dungeons and Dragons game or you're working in an academic library [and] want to go into public or the other way around: you're building a lot of skill [...] there.”

– Jordyn Richey

Poppy: Such a complicated question. You know, like you said it's not like 'Oh well, I did it for this reason' because I truly have loved all of the work I've done. None of it's been to necessarily get away from something. And while I... still think of myself as a public librarian in my heart, I also really love my work as a school librarian. So, for the sake of my family, I went from public librarianship to school librarianship. It allowed me to mother the way I wanted to mother and still do work that I love. So my kids are all students at the school where I work and I'm able to have that connection with them in their school and also with my colleagues and their teachers.

But I also feel like a public servant in my heart, and because it's an independent school, I've struggled with that. I'm trying to figure out

how to match those professional goals. That's part of why I also teach at Syracuse. I get to have a hand in that work as it goes out and I'm seen as an instructor with experience in both worlds. So that doesn't answer your question at all, but that's what I had.

Johanna: But I think it does, and I'm curious what other folks have to say. I think I'm hearing that choices are not always about the career path, but about our well-being and what we need to do for our lives, whether that is income, making a decision to work someplace because that is the only place we can get a job at right now, or because of parenting choices. There are so many reasons, and I appreciate that you raised those front and center.

[What are] other folks' thoughts? Was this a decision to switch?

Jennifer: I can speak to this a little bit. I had a number of reasons to

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make the switch when I did, but my interest in academic libraries goes back to when I was in grad school getting my MLIS. When I started the program, I thought I was going to be a school librarian and I took all of the classes to get my certification.

But while I was getting my MLIS, I was lucky enough to be a student librarian at Suzzallo at UW. I also worked as a student librarian with SPL and completed an internship as a school librarian at a local middle school. I enjoyed those experiences a lot, and so, when I graduated I felt like I could easily go in any of those directions. Right after I graduated, I ended up working as a Business Librarian at UW. It was a part-time position and I picked up another part-time position at Pierce College as a Reference and Instruction Librarian. This was during the financial crisis and libraries started implementing hiring freezes, so my part-time position was going to stay that way indefinitely and I needed a full-time job. In the meantime, I had applied to the KCLS Librarian employment pool and ended up getting called for two interviews. One of them was for a full-time Adult Services position, so when they offered me the job, I took it.

I enjoyed being a public librarian, but I did often think fondly about my time at UW and being an academic librarian and I wanted to try to go back to academic libraries. It is really difficult to make the switch from public to academic, for a myriad of reasons and so, when this position came up, I thought I should go for it.

Jordyn: Yeah, I identify with that a lot—during school doing all the different kinds of librarianship. When I was getting my MLIS I worked in digital preservation. I worked as a librarian at an independent living facility for seniors. I did an internship with SPL, and I did an internship at an academic art library so I was doing all sorts of things, because I liked all of it.

So I wasn't really sure what direction I was going to go in and this opportunity just kind of popped up at the Art Museum. [...] I also have a background in Fine Arts so everything kind of just pieced together. But ultimately the things that I liked about all those different [institutions] was getting to help people and work with the community. And I felt that at the institution I was at I didn't really have that opportunity like I would at a public library, I felt like there

was a big separation between me and my patrons and what I was able to do for them and provide for them. [...] So I then actively sought out public libraries and I'm not gonna lie, pay has something to do with it as well. I know we don't think of public libraries as paying very well and they don't, but museums are worse. Way, way, way worse and I wasn't making a living wage. I needed to make a living wage.

Reilly: I am very similar to both Jordyn and Jennifer. I really tried to experience as many different types of librarianship as I could which included working the Research Commons in the Allen library, doing internships at Seattle Public Library and King County Libraries and working briefly with UW Special Collections. My goal was to get as much "real world" library experience as I could.

When I started library school I thought that I would go work in public libraries. Specifically, I wanted to do outreach with older adults and so that was always kind of my drive but I didn't really know how to navigate that. My experience

working in the Research Common was an eye opener that there were opportunities for outreach in lots of different types of libraries. My experience doing workshops and programming opened my mind to the possibility of working in academic libraries. So as graduation was approaching, and I was in full hustle mode, I expanded my job search to both public and academic libraries. At that time, Seattle U had 4 openings, two of which were outreach focused, and I thought it would be a good fit. I was hired as the Outreach Librarian and over the 6 years I worked there I was able to gain experience in outreach, marketing, communications and programming. When I heard about the job opening at Washington Talking Book & Braille Library, and the fact that it was an outreach position focused on older adults, I had to go for it. It was an opportunity I couldn't pass up.

Poppy: I was just saying I saw that job come up and I thought wow that sounds like such an amazing job—so congratulations and I think that's great.

Reilly: Thank you.

Johanna: I think it's telling that we all saw the job posting as well,

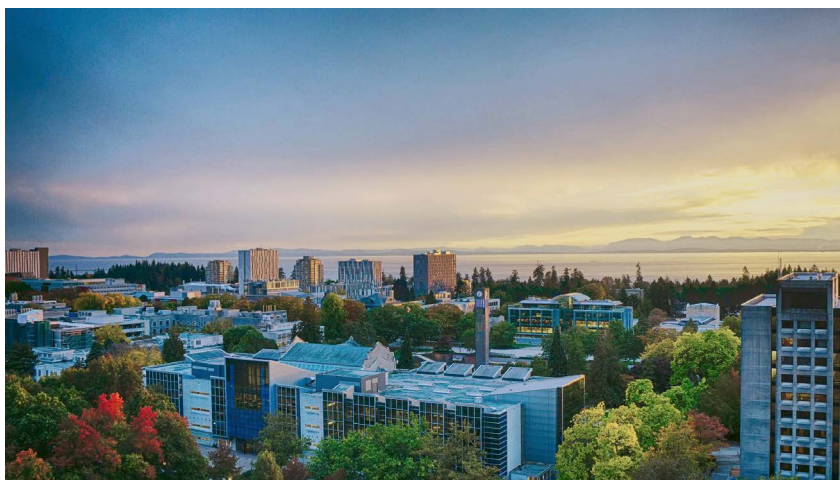


Photo by [Owen Yin](#) on [Unsplash](#) UBC Campus in Vancouver

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right? Helene since we haven't heard from you yet. I'm curious when you listen to us, how does this mirror and reflect iSchool student experiences now in terms of the, you know, frantic trying on all the different library hats.

I volunteered at the Seattle Municipal Archives for a full year during graduate school. But there's this—the hustle, right, the word that Reilly used— [which] is exhausting and, quite frankly, terrifying at times; I am still in a temporary position after three years. Job insecurity in our field is horrific, and I think part of the issue that I'm sort of spinning around in my brain is if we could crossover between library types more easily, [...] that flexibility and crossover of skills would help students find employment. So: I'm curious about your take on where things are at right now, Helene.

Perspectives on the State of the Field

Helene: We're overt in our recruiting, curriculum building, and career guidance: we don't want you to come in and say I'm going to be an archivist and all I'm going to do is take archives classes....

We want students in the program who are going to experiment and take a children's lit class, the adult reader services class, the digital curation class and the digital humanities class, and poke around and see what sticks. All of you, whether you've said it or not, have realized that things from classes that didn't on the face of it apply to what you're doing now totally fit in in terms of outreach programming, figuring out your audience, how you collect materials for these groups, how you manage people. Our goal for all our students is that they do get these transferable skills.

What we need to work on programmatically is getting students to articulate those skills so that, when they go look for jobs and, as Johanna very rightly says, the market is not particularly great right now....

But getting you to articulate, what are the skills that translate and to think outside that box, where else can you fulfill those needs. So like Reilly, when you were talking about what you thought you would be doing versus where you have ended up [doing], you are doing a lot of the things that drove you there. But you would never have thought:

“One of the things I’m doing this fall is meeting with industry folks because that’s where the jobs are — especially if you’re in the Seattle area. Because they need librarians but they don’t know it, and if you tell them they need librarians, they just close the door, turn off the zoom or whatever.”

– Helene Williams

“a special library.” And so helping you translate what [you learned] in that children's lit or adult reader services class, what skills you have and what situation you can use them in [is important]. Giving you enough information so you understand what these different situations can be, [...] part of that's on the career services folks.

One of the things I'm doing this fall is meeting with industry folks because that's where the jobs are, especially if you're in the Seattle area. Because they need librarians but they don't know it, and if you tell them they need librarians, they just close the door, turn off the zoom or whatever My goal is to figure out what vocabulary they are using; should I just say metadata a lot, or taxonomist instead of cataloger, because those are the skills that Amazon, Tableau, Google, and Facebook need.

What do those jobs look like, and what are those skills, so that we can also make sure we're providing the curriculum. The onus is on all of us, and especially going forward for the students coming into the program, getting them right out of the gate to think in terms of transferable skills.

Transferable Skills

Johanna: So it raises a question for the whole group. Maybe you think about the interviews you went through to get your current position. Or maybe you think about the work that you do on a day-to-day basis: what are those crossover skills that you feel may have made a difference in getting the job.

I mean, I find on the one hand that this is intuitive, right? The ability to communicate, and work in a group, the sort of public-facing interface with [library patrons] and understanding how that work is done, and bringing skills of empathy and socioemotional work. (Emotional labor is something we can use another meeting-slash-conversation for!) But I'm wondering how you see these transferable skills.

Jordyn: I have a lot of thoughts about this actually. I mentioned before that my background is in fine art and so I've been having to do this since I've been in the job market, since the beginning of everything for me.

And so I am a huge believer that everything that you do is building

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your skill set; it doesn't matter if it is in retail, it doesn't matter if it is because you're running a Dungeons and Dragons game or you're working in an academic library [and] want to go into public or the other way around: you're building a lot of skill sets there.

So, like Helene said, it is like picking out what those skill sets are and wording it to apply it to the thing you want. So honestly writing I think is a huge, undervalued skill, so if writing is not like already something that a person feels confident in, taking classes on that and really trying to build up your ability to convey your skills and thoughts into words and customize that, for whatever you're trying to do, I think, is the most important thing honestly.

Poppy: I totally agree with that and I would even say that I will talk about that in interviews: I just love how everything works together, and people really like hearing that. So even if my life experience on paper doesn't necessarily tick all the boxes, the fact that I can recognize that my experiences do or have the potential to, I feel like that's been really well received.

To kind of switch back to what you were saying earlier, Helene, about [the fact that it is] on all of us: I remember in my college [years] where I got into a kind of yelling match with a classmate; it actually wasn't a yelling match, I was the one yelling. But they were complaining and complaining and complaining about certain classes not meeting [their] needs and that they were looking for this and that and—I just lost it. I was like: you know what, I love this program, and you need to make it what you want it to be.

And so you know it is on all of us, and I think that's one thing that I came to the program with was this excitement of like: oh, all of these things I have thought I might do means I'm a librarian. I had never worked at a library, but you know, I really believe in granting people access to the information they need to get to where they're going, and once I figured out that's what a librarian is or an information professional is, that's when I knew I'd found my people.

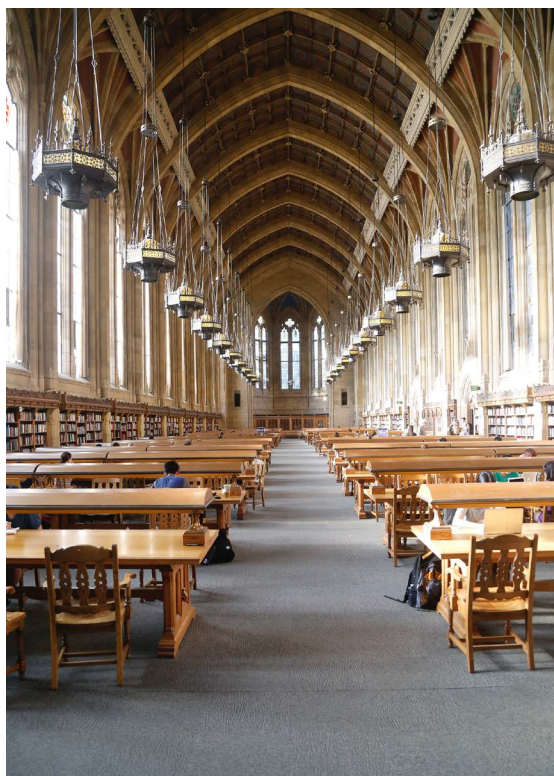
So I think receiving that message for people who don't have that solid feeling when they come into the program is super important. And I think it builds a sort of a gateway from "this sounds exciting" to "this is what I'm going to do to make it fit me." Because it's such a personal journey: yes, here's the curriculum and here are the

instructors but, I have to be committed to bring myself to it and make it into what I need it to be.

Reilly: [...] What really helped me was the fact that I worked before I started grad school. I spent 10 years working in the nonprofit sector and so when I applied to the iSchool, I had a vision of combining non profit work with librarianship. I also found the practical classes I took like Collection Development and Reference to be hugely impactful. The skills I learned in those classes are skills I still use on a regular basis. So anything that allowed me to get that in-person experience, like internships, was really valuable.

Johanna: I am going to say +1,000 to the practical courses taught by professionals in the field who have recent experience in what it is like to work in various library settings. These were extraordinarily valuable. And for the readers of the article there's nodding in the room. [...]

Jennifer: I will chime in about what Jordyn said about writing. I completely agree and would also like to emphasize how important writing skills are. When I started looking for positions outside of public libraries, I had to ask myself how do I communicate that my skills are relevant to a different type of organization? Being able to communicate that through a cover letter or resume is key, and of course, during an interview as well. You see communication skills listed as required in almost every single job description and it's easy to dismiss that or think of it as a given, but this process highlighted how crucial they are.



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Barriers to Applying and Systemic Issues

Poppy: I also think it's important to just do that every now and then. I don't know if you all have trouble with imposter syndrome. But whenever I feel really down on myself I just apply for a job that might be out of my league, so I can be like "oh, I'm actually smart and I actually have the sort of knowledge that I need to do this job." I really have to sit down and think about all the things I've done and articulate it clearly because it has to be well-written, carefully thought out. And sometimes I submit the application and sometimes I don't. But it always helps to regenerate my commitment to what it is I'm doing and my confidence in that.

Helene: I am so glad you said that because I also wanted to bring up

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the issue of gender [vis-a-vis] employment in terms of when women apply versus when men apply for jobs. Men will apply when they meet 60% of the qualifications, women are like, “I’ve got to meet 110%” before they’ll even put in an application.” So getting into that mindset of “hey, what am I doing in a school library that would apply to an academic library”—which is just about everything, because a lot of it is about managing people who are toddlers at heart. Being able to articulate that whether you send off that letter or not is huge, because it does help with the imposter syndrome, it does help with the “yeah, I am qualified for these jobs” and so I’m thrilled that you brought that up, and that you do it as kind of a regular exercise.

Johanna: I realized how much I miss being in your classes Helene: this is joyous for me just and listening to you all. What I’m hearing, though, is that a lot of this is an act of translation: it’s taking our skills and translating them to meet what another job thinks—right?

At the same time I get [frustrated] really quickly when—and I don’t know if this was anybody else’s experience—but when prior experiences that Jordyn, for example, mentioned, get discounted because they don’t have the label “library.” I have a robust academic background and yet that experience is not applicable in the library job market, so I am seen as an early career librarian, and although I’ve been in academia 20 plus years. [...] You know, Helene has been talking about who the onus is on: employers, for goodness sakes, look at experience that is not cookie cutter, that is not what you expect necessarily. Look at experience so it’s not just [...] on us to contort ourselves. [...].

Helene: I would agree, Johanna. You know from my courses, we do things like look at job postings and try to parse what is it they want, does anybody actually do all this, versus what you would actually do in the job. You’re right, there’s a lot of bureaucracy, not just from whoever is posting the position, but the HR people behind them and then the organization beyond that. By the time that job gets posted, it’s unrecognizable to the hiring manager.

Some organizations like the Digital Library Federation really poke

at that and say: “hey, nobody can do all this, do you really need this, and this, and this.” And you have to post a salary, which gets absolutely to Jordyn’s point of: you need to know before you apply is this worth your time, to do all that translation. If it’s not going to be a job that will [...] pay you enough to eat.

So yeah, it absolutely is on the organizations and that’s something that we try to poke at. But it’s one of those big, oppressive patriarchal systems. You know it’s going to take a bunch of us to shift that.

“What really helped me was the fact that I worked before I started grad school. [...] I also found the practical classes I took like Collection Development and Reference to be hugely impactful. The skills I learned in those classes are skills I still use on a regular basis. So anything that allowed me to get that in person experience, like internships, was really valuable.”

– Reilly Curran

Experience of Switching

Johanna: [...] I am wondering if now’s a good time to ask you what the experience was like.

It doesn’t have to be an affective experience but—was it hard switching library types or interesting or exciting, or what struggles did you face when you got there.[...]

Jennifer: The experience has been overwhelming and challenging, but very positive. My experience also includes an international move, so it’s been a lot to process. I’ve received a lot of support from colleagues and warm welcomes which has been helpful.

Poppy: I feel polarized. I really loved being in public libraries; I worked with babies and people that were very old and everyone in between, and I loved that. I

loved it so much. I loved that every single interaction was completely different. I also loved those — you know every now and then you get a library patron who just really needs a librarian; I loved to be able to be that person.

At the risk of getting emotional, one of my little kids was the kind of kid who people warned me about, because he would just run around and get into everything. I always attach myself to those people, especially if I get warned: I’m like, “Oh good, I know who to really love,” because they need to be loved. He always wore a Superman Cape. When I was moving from that library to the school library he gave me a little Superman figurine and said: “I just don’t want you to ever forget me.” Which of course I wouldn’t, right? Because he’s got my whole heart, so that figurine is always on my desk and I get to tell

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my students about it whenever they ask.

Being in a school, I get to have more solid connections with more people. That's more consistent, but they don't ...those kids don't have the same needs that some kids have at the public library. I am one sort of super dedicated person to them, and they have a whole faculty of super dedicated teachers, which is great. But that's something I really miss about being in public libraries.

And then to add on, being this adjunct faculty member I realized that I get reviews from people who don't really like [my classes]. Most people do like my classes, but then there's one or two that are like, "God she's emotional," or whatever. Like, "I just wanted to stay on task, and she told a good story about a kid with a Superman figurine and I didn't need that." Of course, those are the two comments [...] I just read over and over and over. I love teaching these classes, but I really struggle with trying to navigate that kind of feedback. It's tricky.

All three of these experiences have great pluses and painful minuses. I still don't know where I'll be next, because I'm always looking at other options, and how I can fit all of the different things I've done into one sort of "here's why you want me and then I'll go when you don't."

Jordyn: I went in the other direction—to public libraries.

And the actual "being able to do it" was hard up until the point that I found people who were willing to give me a chance when I was coming from another direction.

I found that once you got into the room with people, they were a lot more willing to help you out. But getting through the algorithms was the rough part for me, and transitioning from special libraries to public. But the actual experience of it, I have no minus. Except maybe that you don't always get a consistent nine to five at public libraries [...]. But I have no actual minuses, but I think that has more to do with my personal desires and personal disposition than the nature of the different kinds of jobs. I really like having a bigger

community to work with and that feeling that I'm working more directly with my community than I had in my previous position. And the pace is better.

Reilly: It has been a very different experience. Working in academia, I felt like I was on a treadmill of sorts, always having to look for the next thing and it felt like I couldn't rest. My current library is a different and slower pace. Things don't always feel like they are on fire, which is nice.

Jordyn: I should also say that in my previous work, I was a solo librarian running my library, and now I work with a big team—so for me that was very positive. [...]

Poppy: I want to respond to something you said, Reilly, which is that you're just always on a treadmill and go, go, go, go. I was a barista for a long time, and I think there's so much in common with being a barista and being a librarian.

And I loved it. One thing I miss the most about being a barista—I never went home to figure out how I could pull a nicer shot for the person, the next day—like never.

And every night I think about how I can be a better librarian tomorrow. And that's one thing I love about being a librarian, but it's also so taxing. I don't know how to compartmentalize that from home, you know [...] I definitely

don't leave my work at work every day [...]. I almost feel like there could be a course or part of a course that talks about "here's how you compartmentalize your life in order to enhance your success at work" or something along those lines. [...]

Jordyn: Yes, yes I think it's really on employers to bring in our other skill sets. So if your employer does offer professional development, take them up on it—do it.

Poppy: Actually, every time I ask for professional development, they give it to me, and they've paid for certifications and I'm so lucky and so grateful. I actually said to my head of school one time, I'm just so

“I'd like to echo everything said about relationships and having an open mind. [...] That curiosity and relationship building led me to more committee opportunities and eventually I even chaired a committee which gave me leadership experience which helped bring me to the position I have now. So, a huge yes to relationships and learning more about libraries across North America and what your colleagues are up to.”

– Jennifer Fairchild Simms

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grateful for this. And he said other heads of school have said things like, “well what if you pay for all this professional development, and they just leave?” and he said, “well, what if you don’t and they stay?” And I just think that’s such an insightful way to think about it: first of all I’m grateful and I love this access that I have to professional development, and second of all, I’m clearly dedicated to personal growth and that’s what he wants in his faculty. And so I think that’s so smart as an employer: “I believe in you and I believe in your strengths and also, I hope you stick around.” [...]

Wrapping Up

Johanna: Slow librarianship is a thing, right, Meredith Farkas in Oregon is writing about slow librarianship. This [comes to mind] when you’re talking, Reilly, about the barista pace [...]. I can shut the door at night much more easily in this role [as an academic librarian instead of an academic]; I have a little signature in my email saying “my email hours may not be yours, these are the hours I’m available” and it feels fantastic and I love being able to hold those boundaries that I didn’t use to be able to.

But [I have] so many thoughts about what the pandemic [did] with the boundaries between home and work looking very different [...].

We have talked for nearly an hour [...], so I want to offer up the space for any last thoughts on this, recognizing that we could talk about structural barriers, imposter syndrome, emotional labor, and more for much longer. It clearly feels like there’s a lot of overlap in experience but also [a ...] care for community.

Poppy: One thing that comes to mind is wishing there was more emphasis on “networking”. So much of it is who you know, but it’s not just a buzzword. It is really important to get to know the people out there.

Johanna: Yeah, I would love to reframe it as relationship building.

Jordyn: Yes.

Helene: You’re right, the framing is so important. I have a class where I assign people to do informational interviews and I can totally

tell—who did it as a transaction and who did it as a reflective “oh my God the door just opened, and you know I have found this thing I want to explore” assignment.... It’s building those relationships and figuring out how to infuse that into the curriculum. And how to show every student in the program that this is important, but it’s also on me to make sure I can connect to people who are going to be useful to the students. Which again is why I’m going to Tableau and industry; those relationships are hard to build because they’re almost all about transactions, and it’s so different in these different information professional settings. So yeah, that’s something that 40 years on, I am still working on.

“One of the things I’m doing this fall is meeting with industry folks because that’s where the jobs are — especially if you’re in the Seattle area. Because they need librarians but they don’t know it, and if you tell them they need librarians, they just close the door, turn off the zoom or whatever.”

— Helene Williams

Reilly: Yeah, I’m a big believer in informational interviews. Before I graduated I made a point of doing as many as I could. Funnily enough, I actually did one with my now boss. I remember thinking how cool it would be to work at WTBBL and now 6 years later, here I am. Informational interviews are great because it is really just meeting people, and hearing about people’s experiences; It didn’t feel high stakes like a job interview but instead I was just having a conversation and asking: “how’d you get to where you are” and “tell me your story.”

Helene: But getting industry to get their head around the word library, or MLIS, is right there:

like what can they do, they can do everything an MSIM student can do, plus human and values-based stuff.

Jennifer: I’d like to echo everything said about relationships and having an open mind. One of the things that I did back when I was a Teen Librarian was join YALSA and volunteer for committee work. Part of my motivation was to be able to one day serve on a book award committee, but a lot of my motivation in getting involved was to learn more about what my colleagues were doing all around the country. I wanted to know what their libraries were like, their experiences, how they handled challenges, hear more about their programming ideas, etc. That curiosity and relationship building led me to more committee opportunities and eventually I even chaired a committee which gave me leadership experience which helped bring me to the position I have now. So, a huge yes to relationships and learning more about libraries across North America and what your colleagues are up to.

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I also just want to put in a little plug for the whole idea of librarians being information professionals. Academic, public, school, and special librarians are all information professionals and don't need to be specialists in a particular field to be a successful information professional and an asset to an organization.

Helene: You are absolutely right Jennifer.

Poppy: We're guardians of information. And usually, when I say that people are like, "oh...."

Jennifer: I remember when I was getting my MLIS one of my fellow students was working at the Engineering Library and didn't have a background in engineering, but they were able to use their skills to successfully serve patrons at that library. So, yeah, we're information professionals.

Helene: Right, we can do this.

Jordyn: [This] was one of the best things I was told in grad school—actually by you Helene: that you don't need to like be an expert on a subject to be a librarian and, knowing that and being able to transfer those skills, I mean that is the only reason I got a job anywhere.

Helene: Not the only.

Jordyn: I don't know if I would have had the confidence to apply to the art museum job even with my background in art: [...] so like people—just apply.

Helene: That's what [...] every current student could take away from this talk: figure out what those transferable skills are, figure out where your skill gaps are, what do you think you want to poke around [in], and build relationships. Build that network and be open.

Especially the last two years it's been really hard for students to do that; how do we get them the appropriate curriculum, how do we get that in the support services so that everybody walks out being able to write a good letter that shows they're employable across a number of areas and that they're excited and engaged.

Johanna: I am so grateful for your time on it. I feel like we could clearly keep talking.

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Call for Contributors

by the Alki Editorial Committee and Alki Editor

Anti-racism, equity, diversity and inclusion (AEDI) work is a core, guiding principle for Alki and the WLA. In an effort to highlight AEDI, Alki now features a permanent column dedicated to these themes. In creating this column July 2020 and launching it this November, we do not intend to limit the conversation to this space.

We are considering whether a regular columnist, instead of shared contributions, is the way to go; these will be ongoing conversations that we will be transparent about.


Each Alki issue is a dynamic collection of submissions from library workers and students across the state; the content is dependent upon those who choose to share their voices. Due to the justice-focused nature of libraries and library work, AEDI themes may naturally show up in the pieces we receive and believe that it will be reflected across many of the feature articles that are published. However, they are not always guaranteed. We, the Alki Editorial Committee, intend for this column to ensure that justice-focused work and stories are consistently elevated and that conversations are sustained.

We are energized to call on our entire community of library workers—in any role—to submit articles for this column by emailing alkieditor@wla.org. Please include the article in your email and a brief biography. The deadline is rolling, and we will consider all articles that are submitted that address AEDI themes.

Articles can be about, but are not limited to:

- accountability
- equity and social justice
- anti-racism
- dismantling existing structures and examinations of power
- community-led engagement

For examples, check out our November 2020 issue for work by Dr. Michelle Martin, and our current March 2021 issue for an article by dindria barrow.

Questions? Please reach out to the Alki Editor by emailing alkieditor@wla.org. 

Centering Staff: Reflections on Equity in Pandemic Times and for the Future

by Heather Cyre and Tami Garrard

On March 9, 2020, the University of Washington system shifted to a fully online teaching and learning environment in response to the developing COVID-19 pandemic. The UW Bothell and Cascadia College Campus Library closed to in-person services on March 20, 2020 and during spring and summer we developed and implemented new service models to provide a continuity of access to library collections and services for the University of Washington Bothell and Cascadia College.

For the remainder of the 2019-2020 and the entire 2020-2021 academic year, librarians provided instruction and research assistance online. Access Services staff provided access to the physical collections by developing a contact-free pickup service, increasing purchases of streaming media and eBooks, temporarily deaccessioning Reserves titles, and extending loan periods of reference, media, and other local collections. Technology Support Services staff created a contact-free laptop checkout process, provided remote technology support to library staff, and prepared computers and other building technologies in anticipation of a future reopening.

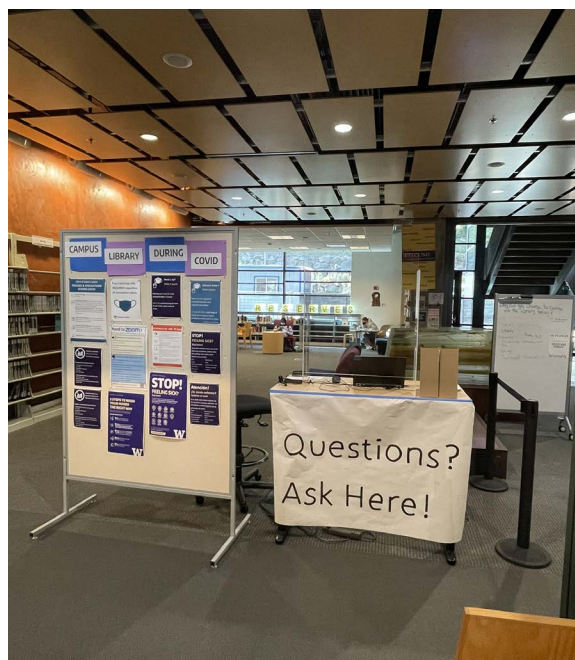


Image courtesy of Heather Cyre.

A COVID/Reopening Planning Team was assembled in late 2020, composed of library leadership and staff from Access Services and Library Technology Services, to begin the unprecedented lift of planning how to safely reopen the library building. Underpinning the creation, implementation, and changes to services provided during the building closure was the concern for staff safety and ensuring those staff concerns were heard, acknowledged, and incorporated.

As supervisors of staff who would largely shoulder the load of reopening, we wanted to approach reopening planning through this same lens of staff safety and staff-centered concern. To do this, we had to first understand the campus and pandemic-related environment we would be returning to, acknowledge disparities between job classifications, and provide space for genuine dialogue if we were to reopen in a safe and staff-centered manner.

Reopening Challenges

With the official announcement of a return to in-person learning for the 2021-2022 academic year, while still amid a pandemic, the Reopening Team faced a number of challenges:

- The emergence of the highly-contagious Delta variant
- Continued changes in health guidance and safety protocols
- Evolving institutional preparations for autumn quarter
- Two years of new students, faculty, and staff unfamiliar with campus
- Hiring and training of almost entirely new student employees
- Reorienting and retraining seasoned staff after 18 months of closure

Heather Cyre is the Head of Public Services and a Research & Instruction Librarian at the University of Washington Bothell and Cascadia College Campus Library. Heather provides leadership and strategic vision for Access Services and Research Help Services. When not advocating for staff and somewhat managing email, she enjoys fountain pens, live music, British dramas, and parallel parking.

Tami Garrard is the Access Services Manager at the University of Washington Bothell and Cascadia College Campus Library. Tami's favorite part of her job is working alongside student employees and recognizes that an entirely different article should be written about learning from and supporting student employees during Covid. When she is not at the library or working to unionize professional staff and librarians at UW Libraries, Tami enjoys all things wild.

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- Conducting searches for new staff after a hiring freeze was lifted
- Being short staffed
- Potential for fluctuating staffing levels due to hybrid work schedules, illnesses, and/or caregiving responsibilities

Taking all of this into consideration, the Reopening Team was very focused on developing protocols and procedures that would acknowledge and address the concerns of staff who had already been working on campus, and who would continue to hold much of the responsibility for on-site public-facing services when

our building reopened. These concerns included not only logistics for ensuring safety in our spaces, but recognizing how the return of all staff to the building and full library operations in the midst of a pandemic would affect the emotional and mental well-being of impacted staff. Additionally, we had an increasing understanding of the disparate impacts of the pandemic on different classifications of staff and were committed to centering staff safety and issues of equity in the planning and reopening processes.

Acknowledging Staff Inequities

At the beginning of the pandemic, the first group of Campus Library employees to begin remote work were librarians. Although not an easy transition, reference and instruction could be moved to an online modality. Access Services and Computing staff, however, remained in the building in public-facing positions until the building closed. Similarly, as contact-free pick up and returns were introduced during the campus closure, it was again Access Services and Computing staff who commuted to campus, handled materials, wore uncomfortable masks for long periods of time, and had in-person interactions, albeit contact-free. Maintaining staff safety has been the highest priority during the entire pandemic, but even so it would be an error to not acknowledge that some workers were carrying a burden that others were not. And, as we saw across the globe with essential workers, it was disproportionately our lower-wage earning workers carrying that burden.

Furthermore, as the Reopening Team discussed the challenges identified above, it became clear that reopening our building would mean that staff at the Information and Computing Help

desks would experience a great deal of additional pressure, not only affecting staff workload at these service points but also their ability to maintain social distancing and their own boundaries.

Meanwhile, because of the success of online research services and instruction, librarians planned to continue an online research services model at the beginning of Fall Quarter. While eliminating in-person research help would reduce the number of bodies behind the desk, these decisions also continued to emphasize the inequities in our library reflective of our larger context.

Discovering Staff Needs

In early 2021 Access Services supervisors created intentional reflection space for staff to process and prepare for the coming

academic year through the following discussion prompts:

- What needs do you anticipate as you think about the library opening its doors again?
- What concerns do you have about the library opening its doors or returning to/increasing on-site work? What have you been hearing from others? (this could be our campus community members, contacts you have at other institutions, the people in your life who are working on-site at their own jobs, etc.)
- What are you excited about?
- What questions are coming up for you?

These discussion prompts were revisited at each biweekly meeting for four months, which facilitated ongoing conversation and depth to our understanding of collective and individual issues.

Modeled on the Access Services conversations, the librarians used the same discussion prompts in two unit meetings, which surfaced a number of shared concerns between the units: readjusting to in-person services and instruction; specific operational questions (hours, policies, etc.); the unknown impact the plexiglass and masking may have on connecting with our users and each other; balancing the general busy-ness of fall quarter with returning to work amid the pandemic. Both unit discussions also surfaced a number of safety-related questions that were then used by the Reopening team to develop safety practices and internal and external communications. What also emerged in the librarians

“Underpinning the creation, implementation, and changes to services provided during the building closure was the concern for staff safety and ensuring those staff concerns were heard, acknowledged, and incorporated.”

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discussion was an acknowledgment of the disparities between staff classifications, concern for the potential increased burden on staff at the public services desk, and a genuine desire to provide cross-unit support.

Information Station

From conversations with Access Services and the librarians' eagerness to support frontline staff, we created and implemented a new, temporary service desk. The Information Station was envisioned to alleviate the influx of questions to the Information and Computing Help desks at the start of the quarter. Such a station would also allow for more uninterrupted time to focus on training new staff and student employees and adapting to working in and under COVID-related changes (plexiglass, face coverings, etc.).

In designing the model, the Information Station was located in a highly visible area of the library entrance to act as a question triage station, answering general or directional questions and referring individuals to the appropriate library service desks or campus departments. By continuing to route reference questions to our 24/7 online chat reference service, we were able to keep the Research Help desk closed to in-person reference assistance, which served three immediate concerns:

1. Reduce the number of bodies behind the public services desk so that remaining staff could more easily practice social distancing if they preferred.
2. Release librarians from scheduled Research Help shifts in order to staff the Information Station.
3. Staff the Information Station on a voluntary basis to build in flexibility with librarians' instructional schedules and potential for fluctuating staffing related to COVID-19 or caregiving responsibilities.

To support librarians adjusting to a more prominent location on the first floor and the anticipated influx of questions, Access Services staff collaborated on a Frequently Asked Questions document, with questions and answers most often fielded during the first weeks of the new academic year. We routinely updated the FAQ based on changes to services and spaces on campus, incorporated new questions and answers as they arose, and checked in with librarians

on additional improvements or resources needed. Between September 20 and October 14, librarians at the Information Station diverted over 800 questions from the public services desk, 287 questions from the first two days of the fall quarter.

Reflections and Conclusion

Centering staff throughout remote operations and the reopening planning process has taken many forms. The Information Station is one example of an operational change that addressed a variety of Access Services staff concerns while also answering the librarians' desire to assist frontline staff. Other examples include quick staffing model pivots to respond to staff safety concerns during contact-free pickup; developing

robust documentation and scripts to ensure positive face-covering compliance interactions; developing a mechanism for staff to submit questions regarding reopening with timely and regular responses; and incorporating what we learn from submitted questions into external communications, building signage, and our operations.

Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has presented a unique moment of reflection on and impetus for cultural change. Unit and all staff meetings have been improved with more intentional time to connect, reflect, and check in on one another. The library's Leadership Team has started discussing how to apply lessons learned during remote operations to a future post-pandemic environment, addressing things such as telework and technology equity across staff classifications. The Information Station offered a model of reciprocity between job classifications during a particularly challenging time, increased empathy and understanding of each other's work, and re-connection to the campus as a whole. Based on the public and staff response, the Information Station has potential to become a fixture that will continue to facilitate a collaborative and sensitive work environment. The COVID-19 pandemic not only highlighted vast inequities at the national and global levels, but underscored disparities among our staff and within the institution. It is imperative that we continue to learn from this experience and engage in purposeful inquiry of our operations and practices with a focus on equity and centering staff. 📖

“The Information Station offered a model of reciprocity between job classifications during a particularly challenging time, increased empathy and understanding of each other's work, and re-connection to the campus as a whole.”

Critical Conversations through Information Literacy Course Revision

by Alexa Moore

Conversations can ignite change. In libraries, this dialogue might include changes in procedures, revisions of collection development policies, finding ways to serve underserved and marginalized communities and more. One aspect of libraries where there is room for conversation is through information literacy work. Whether it is teaching users how to research and think critically or showing someone how to navigate an online resource, there are always ways to improve upon informal and formal ways of teaching. This became especially apparent to me when I embarked upon an information literacy course revision at a local community college.

I recently graduated with my MLIS degree from the University of Washington iSchool. In the final year of this program, students are asked to conduct a capstone project with an information organization of their choosing. For my culminating project, I collaborated with librarians at Pierce College to revise and re-imagine their online INFO 101: Research Essentials course, an information literacy class available to all, but often taken by Running Start and incoming students. This 2-credit course aims to teach students how to research, evaluate information, and make sense of it through research question development, search exercises, and a final annotated bibliography. Each of the librarians work from a central course shell or base set of Canvas modules that they can then change or add to, to highlight information topics like

“ The themes that emerged included an interest in anti-racist practices and pedagogy, creating a course that was responsive and equitable, connecting the curriculum to local issues, and so on. ”

upon it. What was most eye-opening was not just conducting the project, but also the conversations that ensued throughout the process. These discussions helped fuel the group and ignite new ideas about teaching, policies, and processes of developing this course.

“ It is vital to not just have conversations about challenges and barriers users might face, but also important to take actionable steps whether small or large to begin to create change. ”

misinformation, for example. While the overall goal was to help with the revision process, the librarians more importantly wanted to review the modules through an inclusive, accessible, anti-racist lens. They wanted to better support students of color and those using assistive technologies, while also making sure information was still relevant for the course. Through bi-weekly and monthly meetings, the librarians and I met together to have conversations about the course and how to improve

We considered critical dialogue around how to best serve marginalized student groups, grading policies, module topics, and support for accessibility initiatives. In order to arrive at these discussions, I took on a set of tasks that would allow me to gain better insight and also share findings with the librarians. I first started by surveying the group anonymously, inquiring about each person's goals for the revision, what they have learned

from previous students, and their initial ideas for creating a more inclusive course, whether that be general ideas or resources they'd like to share. From this, I gathered the answers and relayed general themes back to the group about ideas and resources we could use for this update. The themes that emerged included an interest in anti-racist practices and pedagogy, creating a course that was responsive and equitable, connecting the curriculum to local issues, and so on. Not only was the survey necessary to see where everyone stood in terms of interest for updating the course, but it also provided some transparency on the different ways

Alexa Moore is an Adjunct Faculty Librarian at Tacoma Community College and Bellevue College. She is a foodie, lover of poetry, lifelong learner, and likes getting outside to enjoy all that the Pacific Northwest has to offer!

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INFO 101 Research Essentials: Re-imagined & Re-designed

Elexa Moore, MLIS '21



dialogue among colleagues and within different library settings in general. Each time we met to discuss revisions or updates, it would spark another topic of discussion around what was also going on in the larger organization and how the library worked within that structure. Beyond this library, I think there are useful takeaways from this project that can be relayed into any type of library or information organization. It is vital to not just have conversations about challenges and barriers users might face, but also important to take actionable steps whether small or large to begin to create change. While discussions can sometimes be uncomfortable or challenging, it's important to remain flexible and open,

people teach and explore information topics. From an outside perspective, it also gave me insight into the ways that individuals were centering student voices, uplifting marginalized groups, and working with the students to help them grasp the information. Once the survey was complete, I compiled the answers and shared them with the group, leading to conversations where librarians could gather new ways to think about their own versions of the course.

After initial discussions with the revision team, my supervisor and I began thinking about tools that would be useful for each librarian to assess their own work. Through research, we located inclusive teaching rubrics from universities across the United States that could be used as inspiration for the team as we thought about possibly building our own rubric as a future course assessment tool. Reading through these informed my own assessment of the course, which I provided to the librarians at the end of the capstone. Through an informal assessment, I suggested areas that could be improved upon or changed, whether it was by incorporating greater details about searching by teaching students about Boolean operators or sharing how students could incorporate their own identities into their research. I pinpointed areas where students could better see themselves as contributors of information and made sure to highlight the lived experiences and interests of students as opportunities for further exploration.

The ability to work alongside librarians at Pierce College was a valuable experience for me. It shed light on the importance of

because that is the only way change can occur. While the revision process of this course shell is still a work in progress, it is important to note that change does not always happen overnight. There are opportunities to carry out actions that will help library services and resources continually improve.

I am extremely grateful for the experiences and skills I gained while working with the Pierce College Librarians and am hopeful that other institutions and organizations can have critical conversations that lead to important and vital change.

Teaching Rubrics

The following teaching rubrics were reviewed as part of this project:

Marquette University "[Inclusive Teaching Checklist](#)"

California State University Nothridge's "[Ideas for Inclusive Teaching Practices](#)"

Virginia Tech "[Inclusive Teaching Higher Education Rubric](#)"

LibCares: A Community of Practice and a Community of Caring

by Heather Cyre, David K. Frappier, Johanna Jacobsen Kiciman, Ruba Sadi & Elliott Stevens

Founding LibCares

The LibCares Team at the University of Washington Libraries came about unexpectedly. In 2018, before its creation, the Security Committee on the UW Seattle campus would offer a number of meetings a year that were open to anyone in the system. Sometimes, a few people would show up to a session about managing disruptions in library spaces, but once the focus of the meeting was an article from the ALA titled “[Stop Sexual Harassment in Your Library](#).”¹ This time, dozens of people showed up, and the article proved to be a powerful, direct conduit for library workers, nearly all of whom worked in public service, to discuss experiences where they were harassed at public service desks or while doing work in public, like shelving materials alone in the stacks.

This session, with its outpouring of stressful accounts, revealed a need in the UW Libraries: a space and a community for library workers to be able to get together and empathetically share conflicts

Heather Cyre is the Head of Public Services and a Research & Instruction Librarian at the University of Washington Bothell and Cascadia College Campus Library. Heather provides leadership and strategic vision for Access Services and Research Help Services. When not advocating for staff and somewhat managing email, she enjoys fountain pens, live music, British dramas, and parallel parking.

Elliott Stevens is the Research Commons & English Studies Librarian at the University of Washington, Seattle. He has library interests in digital scholarship and the value of written reflection done by library workers while on the job. These past months, he's been making soap, yogurt, and sauerkraut and reading novellas.

Ruba Sadi is the Head of User Experience at the University of Washington Health Sciences Library. She worked in public libraries for many years before making the move to academic libraries. She enjoys traveling, visiting museums, reading, British dramas and daily walks.

David Frappier is a Library Supervisor in the Branch Operations services unit of the University of Washington Libraries where he supervises the phenomenal technicians responsible for staffing our seven subject specific branch libraries. He is also a student in the University of Washington iSchool's MLIS Program. Outside of work and school, David enjoys baking overly elaborate desserts, playing board games, and reading graphic novels.

Johanna Jacobsen Kiciman is the outgoing Alki Editor and incoming WLA Vice President of the board. She has deeply appreciated the past two years here at Alki learning from WLA members about their interests. Thank you!

and questions they have about their work with the public. Instead of putting together a committee or a taskforce, the LibCares Team, which is more like a community of practice, was assembled. Loosely defined, we view the idea of a community of practice as

“a group of people who share a common concern, a set of problems, or an interest in a topic and who come together to fulfill both individual and group goals [with a ...] focus on sharing best practices and creating new knowledge to advance a domain of professional practice.”²

From the beginning, its focus has been to improve communication and reporting about disruptions in the UW Libraries as well as to provide a caring domain for library workers.

The University of Washington Libraries operates as one library serving three campuses. As such, LibCares team membership as of 2020, is composed of public services and administrative staff from each of the three campuses of the University of Washington system: UW Seattle, UW Bothell, and UW Tacoma. This collection of unique perspectives is valuable because our three campuses serve different populations, have different staffing models, and have different relationships with campus security units. It is of note to mention that UW Bothell and UW Tacoma found representation in LibCares through the pandemic, when geographic diaspora did not interfere with meetings: we have continued, in fact, to meet over zoom, offering greater accessibility for all staff.

Programming for Compassion and Engagement

The tri-campus LibCares Team works across the Libraries to create a compassionate and engaged library community whose aim is to provide a safe and empathetic space. Its particular focus is to support staff working in public service who handle security incidents and encounter difficult interactions with users; these conversations, of course, by nature, are critical: they are not easy to have, they require a constant examination of labor practices, work culture, compassion for all library patrons, and more.

During the pandemic, it became very clear that isolation proved a radical set of different challenges: from a model of support which helped staff deal with external challenges and difficult interactions, it was apparent that the support needed was for our isolated staff lacking interactions at all. Much of our work March 2020-August 2021 involved listening sessions and holding the space for staff to meet, and “see” each other, with loosely framed conversations about work fears and concerns.

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Some examples of LibCares programming have included:

- Targeted listening sessions for front line staff most heavily burdened with the duty to respond to disruptive behavior
- Workshops on setting boundaries in the workplace and with library users
- Distributing resource cards for every employee's ID lanyards which detailed useful phrases for boundary-setting provided by LibCares and our former Dean of Libraries, Betsy Wilson
- Modifying our internal security database's submission form to ask staff if they would like to talk through the incident with a member of the team
- An in-depth training session on the banning process for student employees who primarily work in the evenings or overnight and who most commonly engage with disruptive users
- Meet and greets with the Chairs of the Security Committee, which included lectures on methods to improve how staff can better respond to disruptive behavior
- A Q & A session to press the University of Washington Police Department (UWPD) on how they respond to disruptive events or to wellness checks on campus and in our libraries
- Specific Covid-19 training sessions on how to de-escalate interactions involving mask compliance and social distancing in our pandemic world

Returning to Onsite

Recognizing the varied impacts of returning to in-person teaching and learning for the 2021-2022 academic year, LibCares wanted to provide space for staff to process the impact of these experiences. To accomplish this, we discovered that despite the multitude of events we had hosted over the years, that staff still felt a gap between themselves and the team. To close it, we elected to use our weekly internal Libraries newsletter as a vehicle to both introduce ourselves. As the return to campus date approached, LibCares shifted gears from written engagement back to virtual engagement and hosted an interactive de-escalation session where participants learned techniques and engaged in a scenario-based activity to encourage comfort and familiarity with de-escalating conflict.

Creating a Community of Care: Our Approach

We would like to share some of the specific ways that set the stage for our staff and colleagues to participate in these critical conversations. As described above, two intertwined methods stand out in our approach: a) personalization of this work through relatability and b) concrete tips and tools made available, but not prescribed.

To personalize the team, LibCares members introduced themselves to all library employees in a series of weekly newsletter posts as a way to create a greater sense of community, transparency, and relatability. Thus:

My name is David Frappier, and I am one of the Library Supervisors in our Branch Operations Services unit responsible for supporting the work of the technicians in our seven subject-specific branch libraries on the UW Seattle Campus. I was part of the initial group of staff who were brought together to build this team and am **so incredibly proud of the work this community of concerned coworkers have accomplished over the past few years**. Through our programming we have shared knowledge throughout our organization which had previously been siloed, have held space for those who felt like they just had to endure in silence the trauma they have experienced in the workplace, and have empowered our colleagues to bring empathy and compassion into every interaction with members of our expansive PNW community.

My name is Johanna Jacobsen Kici-man, and I'm the Coordinator of Research Help & Instruction Librarian at UW Tacoma. Along with a colleague, I supervise and mentor the fabulous reference specialists on our team. During the pandemic, the opportunity for community building and strengthening support networks across the tri-campus libraries became more apparent, and I have been a part of the LibCares Team since October 2020. **It has truly been a joy to get to know folks in different roles across the Libraries.**

I'm Elliott Stevens, and I'm a member of the LibCares Team. I'm an English Studies & Research Commons Librarian at the University of Washington, Seattle, and when we're on campus, part of my job is hiring, training, and supervising eight undergraduate-student library workers. Supervising student workers is one of my favorite parts of my job, and these past couple years, being a part of the LibCares Team and attending our events, I feel like I've been able to become a more caring, more empathetic colleague and supervisor, especially when it comes to the more stressful aspects of working in public service and occasionally encountering disruptions. If you supervise library workers—or if you work in public service in the Libraries—I highly recommend that you participate in LibCares events!

My name is Ruba Sadi, and I am the Head of User Experience at the Health Sciences Library. New to supervising, I joined the LibCares Team in 2019 because I wanted to learn from my colleagues how to support and assist students and staff in handling security incidents and aim for the best responses when navigating tense situations with patrons. **I feel fortunate to be on a committee with members that truly care about the libraries and staff.** Recent Brown Bag discussions proved that staff need a place to go to share their concerns with others in a safe space.

I'm Heather Cyre, the Head of Public Services and a Research and Instruction Librarian in the UW Bothell and Cascadia College Campus Library. Because part of my responsibilities involve safety training and liaising with our Campus Safety department, **I joined LibCares in October 2020 to strengthen my support network in these responsibilities, help create and facilitate meaningful resources and events**, and promote LibCares to staff in the Campus Library.

In conjunction with these introductions, LibCares members shared tips and tools with their over 200 colleagues, focused on empathy, understanding, and self and community care:

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Taking Class Out Into the Community: An African American Read-In Celebrates Black History Month

by Michelle H. Martin and Emily Ready

Dr. Michelle H. Martin

On Sunday, February 28, the final day of Black History Month 2021, 30 of my students in LIS 564, Multicultural Resources for Youth, hosted an African American Read-In, a National Council of Teachers of English initiative that encourages communities to host public events to read aloud and celebrate OwnVoices African American literature.[1] These events can be large or small and can take place anywhere. Students in this class, a youth services elective in the MLIS Program at the University of Washington iSchool, spend the 10-week quarter studying texts from various backgrounds (primarily African American, Native American, Latinx, and Asian American but also some international texts) and immersing themselves in the critical conversations around this literature. They read articles, blogs and book chapters, watch video clips of author talks and panel discussions, listen to podcasts, and learn about what librarians are doing with these books in programs. We even had the pleasure of a lively conversation with writer Kelly Starling Lyons, whose remarkable picture book, *Going Down Home with Daddy*, illustrated by Daniel Minter, won a 2021 Caldecott Honor.

*Dr. Michelle H. Martin is the Beverly Cleary Endowed Professor for Children and Youth Services in the Information School at the University of Washington and from 2011-2016 was the inaugural Augusta Baker Endowed Chair in Childhood Literacy at the University of South Carolina. She published *Brown Gold: Milestones of African-American Children's Picture Books, 1845-2002* (Routledge, 2004) and founded Read-a-Rama (www.Read-a-Rama.org), a non-profit that uses children's books as the springboard for year-round and summer camp programming.*

Emily Ready is a second-year MLIS student at the University of Washington and a student assistant at the Odegaard Undergraduate Library. They have worked in libraries and bookstores and have a passion for reader's advisory, collection development and community outreach. Their cat, Cookie, was in their lap throughout the editing of this article.

For contributing to this article, a special thanks goes to iSchool staff member Nekya Johnson, iSchool alumnae Clare Morrison, Carol Fisher, and students (some of whom are now alumni) Gabi Barragan, Amanda Condon, Skyler Corbett-Hecocta, Corrina Desmarais, Molly Douglas, Kris Fortmann, Em Fredericksen, Maina Gachugu, Liz Gershon, Penny Goldsmith, Dana Graves, Alex Grennan, Ariel Grusz, Jennifer Haakenson, Maureen Hogan, Pamela Johnson, Rachel Kresl, Elizabeth Kunes, Seraphim Lee, Jessica Longo, Patricia Lopez, Catherine Matthews, Hank True Morgan, Emily Parrish, Hannah Raaberg, Shanti Rahim, Zoe Wisser, Caroline Wright, and Elizabeth Yarbrough.

In addition to asking my students to engage academically with this literature, I also always ask them to take this richness out into the community in a substantive way—to give back, to share what they're learning, and also to gain at least a nascent understanding of what it means to build relationships with children and teens, even in virtual spaces, around sharing books.

The African-American Read-In, co-sponsored by the University of Washington's iSchool and [Camp Read-a-Rama](#), my non-profit that has been creating literacy immersion programs and camps for over ten years, gave participants a choice of twelve breakout rooms—ten for children and middle readers; one for open discussion and sharing of young adult texts; and one for adults to discuss African American literature they've been reading. And since no Black History Month program is complete without music, I asked two relatives and a mentee to provide music. Cheryl Jackson Leysath of Columbia, SC, opened the event with the singing of the Black National Anthem, "[Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing](#)"; "souljazz" vocalist Cheri Maree, also from Columbia, SC, shared an original inspirational song, "[Time to Shine](#)," for the musical interlude between the two 25-minute breakout sessions; and teacher Aaron Cokley of Atlanta, Georgia, sang "Stand Up" from the movie *Harriet*, with a clip from the film showing in the background. The event had 369 registrants and 221 attendees. And despite a few technical glitches, everyone had a great time, took away new book titles, and felt moved and inspired by the music. The only Black male in the LIS 564 class invited his whole family, and they came. His older brother said after the event that he's not sure how he got to be 32 years old never having heard the Black National Anthem, but he was delighted to have had the opportunity to hear it.

Katya Yefimova, the Beverly Cleary Research Assistant and teaching assistant for the class and project manager for the Read-In, gave each Zoom breakout room a theme. For this article, we asked the students who planned the programming for each room to describe their experience of hosting this event. The majority of the students in this class are White, and none of them had ever participated in a Read-In previously. But most indicated that they had a positive enough experience to consider hosting their own Read-In events in the future ... and that was clearly a huge part of my motivation for giving them this assignment.

STUDENT-LED PROGRAMMING

In this next section, the class members describe the rooms they led at the African American Read-In in their own voices, explaining the

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goals of each room, the books read, and concluding with reflections about the event.

Amazing Afros (ages 4-8)

Dana Graves, Emily Parrish, Caroline Wright, Elizabeth Yarbrough

A lot of discrimination against African American hair exists in the United States. Because African American children and adults have been unfairly treated for wearing their hair the way they want, our group focused on sharing empowering stories of loving your hair and setting personal boundaries. We began with *Princess Hair* by Sharee Miller, which celebrates natural hairstyles that are often marginalized. Following this, we shared another Sharee Miller title, *Don't Touch My Hair!*, which shows a powerful example of what consent means coupled with communicating one's need for bodily autonomy. We closed with *Stella's Stellar Hair* by Yesenia Moises, in which the main character learns to love her Afro hair, no matter the style.

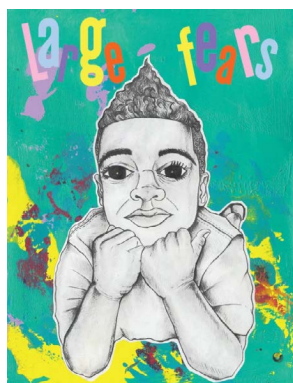


Between books, we invited participants to share what kinds of princess crowns they would like to have, and how they like to decorate their hair (with scrunchies, bobby pins, and more). It was a delight to see kids smiling and enjoying having us read to them; we only wish we could have spent more time with everyone! Zoom events come with challenges, but it is a remarkable experience to connect meaningfully with so many people all around the world.

Rainbow Kids (ages 4-8)

Amanda Condon, Em Fredericksen, Alex Grennan, Shanti Rahim

The Rainbow Kids room centered around the idea that young children need and deserve exposure to books with queer themes, especially those focusing on gender norms and identity. While preparing for this event, LIS students discovered an unsettling lack of African American OwnVoices children's books with queer themes. We were eventually able to find and read *My Rainbow* by DeShanna and Trinity Neal, illustrated by Art Twink; *My Princess Boy* by Cheryl Kilodavis; and *Large Fears* by Myles E. Johnson, illustrated by Kendrick Daye.

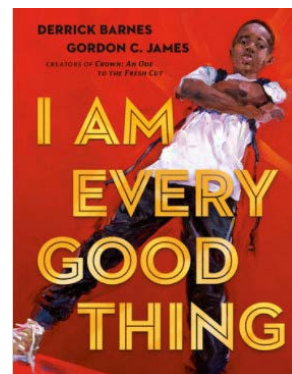


While we were concerned initially that the Zoom room would attract homophobic or transphobic participants (since Zoom bombing has occurred in many virtual programs with LGBTQ content), all of our attendees were respectful and engaged. The interjections from child participants tugged at our heartstrings and let us know we really were filling a need.

Black Boys Rock! (ages 4-8)

Rachel Kresl, Catherine Matthews, Hank True Morgan

The Black Boys Rock room centered on books that shared positive portrayals of Black boys and encouraged African American males to love themselves and all their gifts. Books read included *I Am Every Good Thing* by Derrick Barnes, illustrated by Gordon C. James; *Benny Doesn't Like to Be Hugged* by Zetta Elliott, illustrated by Purple Wong; and *I Am Perfectly Designed* by Karamo Brown and illustrated by Anoosha Syed. The evaluations

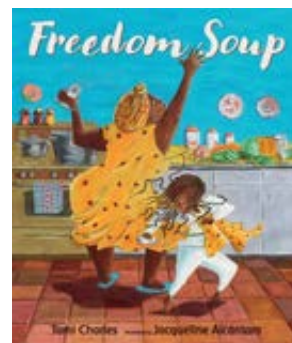


suggested that participants found the students' enthusiasm and energy infectious. "Three cheers to [the students] for using a puppet, singing a song, and encouraging movement, [they] did a great job!" noted one attendee. Attendees also appreciated that "[the students] asked a lot of great questions," encouraging audience participation.

Cookin' up Love (ages 4-8)

Skyler Corbett-Hecota, Pamela Johnson

The LIS students in this food-themed room read two picture books. Skyler Corbett-Hecota read *Freedom Soup* by Tami Charles, in which a grandmother teaches her granddaughter about her family's history and the Haitian Revolution through cooking a special soup. Pamela Johnson read *Thank You, Omu!*, by Oge Mora, which shows how a community comes together through Omu's delicious red stew, the smell of which has been wafting through the neighborhood and making everyone hungry. After each book, attendees were asked a question, such as "What favorite food would you bring to share with Omu?" Participants suggested a variety of yummy foods (which made everyone hungry), but one child said they would bring a handmade card to thank Omu. The hard part was waiting for responses from attendees, especially since younger children



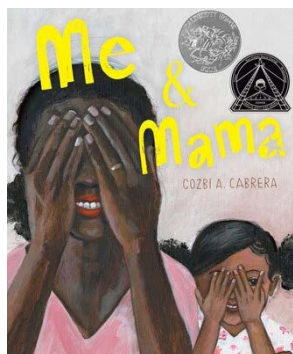
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may be less comfortable with speaking on Zoom. At the end of the session, Corbett-Hecota shared a Haitian song, which was a terrific connection with *Freedom Soup* and a great way to end the session.

Loving Mamas & Grandmas (ages 4-8)

Molly Douglas, Jessica Longo, Zoe Wisser

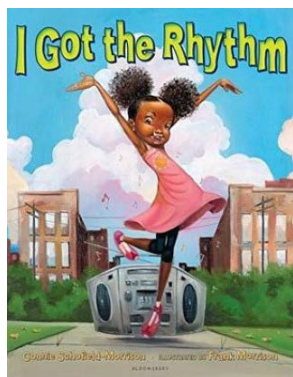
The students in the Loving Mamas & Grandmas room shared books that honored the bond between mothers, grandmothers and the children they love. Books read included *Last Stop on Market Street* by Matt de la Peña, illustrated by Christian Robinson; *Saturday by Oge Mora*; and *Me & Mama* by Cozbi A. Cabrera. Participants appreciated that “The three readers were all very friendly and inviting” and that “Big smiles” helped to make the room a welcoming space for attendees. One participant also noted: “it was clear all three readers loved the stories they were sharing.”



Movin' & Groovin' (ages 4-8)

Penny Goldsmith, Hannah Raaberg

The books read in this room were *Dancing in the Wings* by Debbie Allen, illustrated by Kadir Nelson and *I Got The Rhythm* by Connie Schofield-Morrison, illustrated by Frank Morrison. The online Zoom format created some differences in how we interacted with the participants. Our group had a lot of interactive elements, and while many participants kept their video and audio turned off, some also left their cameras and microphones on. It was so encouraging to look over and see them moving as we read our books, both of which focused on movement. This project really helped me see how many good books are written by African American authors and illustrators for Black children. I also became aware of gaps in covered subjects. This showed the need to have more diverse books that represent a variety of perspectives.



Adventure Avenue (ages 8-12)

Maureen Hogan, Patricia Lopez

This reading room featured *Jaden Toussaint, the Greatest Episode 1: The Quest for Screen Time* by Marti Dumas, illustrated by

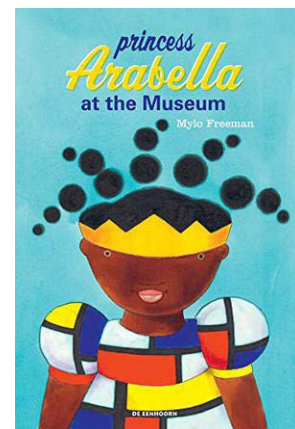
Marie Muravski, and *Bayou Magic* by Jewell Parker Rhodes.

Jaden Toussaint, a picture book, read by Patricia Lopez, features a precocious kindergartener who comes up with several different plans to convince his parents and teacher to let him have more computer time. Sharing an electronic copy on Zoom proved very effective. Through the chat, we shared useful additional activities, including coloring book pages associated with the book. *Bayou Magic*, read by Maureen Hogan, tells the story of Maddy, who travels to the bayou to live with her mysterious grandmother for the summer and learn about the magic of the region. Since this is an unillustrated middle grade chapter book, presenters provided supplementary images in the chat.

Black is Beautiful (ages 4-12)

Corrina Desmarais, Kris Fortmann, Liz Gershon, Seraphim Lee

To celebrate the beauty of being Black in the world, we read aloud *Black is a Rainbow Color* by Angela Joy, illustrated by Ekua Holmes, *Magnificent Homespun Brown* by Samara Cole Doyon, illustrated by Kaylani Juanita, and *Princess Arabella at the Museum* written and illustrated by Mylo Freeman. Each of these inspiring children's picture books portrays young protagonists of color experiencing the world in a positive way. *Black is a Rainbow Color*, written in simple poetic style and beautifully illustrated in

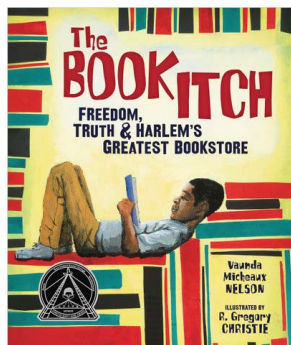


bright colors reminiscent of stained glass windows, traces multiple historical references explored through the lens of “Black is a culture.” *Magnificent Homespun Brown* highlights various lovely shades of brown, each captured as a different young girl's heart-warming experience in the world. *Princess Arabella at the Museum* tells a lively story of a young girl and her friends on a fun and colorful visit to the Princess Arabella museum. As one participant noted, “excellent book choices and excellent readers!” We opened with a slide showing the three book covers, along with pictures of the authors and illustrators, all people of color. Each reader pointed out items in the illustrations with the cursor, adding comments and questions to provoke thought as they read. The third book transitioned well into a drawing exercise, so we suggested at the beginning that listeners be ready to create after the readings. Several children (and adults!) shared their works of art as the session closed. Overall, the children we could see live on Zoom (though most participants kept their cameras off) seemed attentive and engaged. As one professional reviewer noted, our readers’ “contact with the narratives and the voices behind the stories” were effective techniques for this type of read-aloud.

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City Wanderers (ages 8 and up)
Maina Gachugu, Jennifer Haakenson

Jennifer read from *The Book Itch: Freedom, Truth & Harlem's Greatest Bookstore* by Vaunda Micheaux Nelson, illustrated by R. Gregory Christie, a heavy-text picture book for ages 8-12. Maina read excerpts from *Look Both Ways: A Tale Told in Ten Blocks* by Jason Reynolds, a middle grade chapter book. In this room, we focused on highlighting life in the city. Stories can paint many negative pictures of urban environments, but just as we learn in *The Book Itch*, many compelling stories can also emerge from every block of a neighborhood or even on a walk home from school. Because we were pressed for time and each reading ran a bit long, we did not have as much interaction with our listeners as we would have liked. This format for read-alouds is good for fostering family participation, and the focus on OwnVoices resonated well for Black History Month. As a current (Maina) and former teacher (Jennifer), these two facilitators found this read-aloud event a great experience to enable educators to take the idea forward into schools for students (and families!).



Dragon Challenge (ages 8-12)
Gabi Barragan, Ariel Grusz, Elizabeth Kunesb

This room focused on Zetta Elliott's middle grade novel *Dragons in a Bag*, illustrated by Geneva B. This magical tale follows Jax, a sensitive boy with a single mom, who must deliver baby dragons to safety in the city. But Jax has broken the rules: don't let them free and don't feed them sweets! Students read abridged selections from the novel and encouraged participants to draw while they listened to the story. Following the readings, students provided participants with activity pages based on the story. Participants noted the room had "Great selections, abridgements, and activity pages," and that the transitions were "super smooth between readers."



DISCUSSION ROOM FOR YOUNG ADULTS
Clare Morrison, Carol Fisher

The discussion room for young adults gave teen and young adult readers a space to discuss #OwnVoices books that they have been reading. Carol Fisher, UW MLIS alum and library faculty member at Washington State University in Vancouver, co-led the discussion with fellow alum Clare Morrison, Peshastin Branch Librarian at the North Central Washington Libraries in Peshastin, WA. Attendees shared personal favorites and gave dozens of recommendations for young adult literature that not only possessed good storytelling but also provided a space to begin, and build upon. Discussion highlighted the importance and necessity of genuine representation of BIPOC stories and experiences. Some attendees noted that the accessibility of young adult literature gave them starting points to begin having reflective internal and external conversations about how systemic oppression and racist structures play out in their own lives.

DISCUSSION ROOM FOR ADULTS
Nekya Johnson

This room gave adult attendees a space to discuss OwnVoices literature they have been reading. Nekya Johnson, who was the DEI program manager at the UW iSchool at the time, led the discussion. Attendees shared personal reflections and holistic insights from current books in their queue written by African American authors. Attendees had an inclusive discussion about the value of such authors' works and shared recommendations for future readings.

In addition to getting audience feedback from a short post-program survey, Doc Martin also asked several scholar friends who signed up for the program who teach children's literature to visit particular rooms to offer feedback for the students. Each evaluator offered both points for improvement and compliments such as (Loving Mamas and Grandmas) "Take your time with the story that you love. Your enjoyment will shine through – and did!" and (Rainbow Kids) "There was one really lost moment: a child mentioned her brother was a princess boy but no one took up that conversation or connected it back to the book (e.g., "What things about the princess boy in the book remind you of your brother?" "What do you think about...?") The professor in Black Boys Rock commented: "Thanks for sharing some great books! Catherine, three cheers to you for sharing a puppet, song, and movement online with people you don't know!" The visitor in Black is Beautiful said of the students: "They were state of the art professionals." Another said of City Wanderers: Excellent session; they made it feel comfortable and welcoming for participants and chose two fantastic books to share!" The visitor to Movin' and Groovin' noted: "Friendly smiles did the trick."

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CONCLUSION

At a time of uncertainty when what “we’ve always done” isn’t necessarily safe, possible, or advisable, we’ve found many silver linings in pandemic-era programming. First, an international audience has become possible when a good local turnout might previously have been the most ambitious attendance goal. It’s important to schedule programs early enough in the day to enable participants in many other time zones to log on at a reasonable hour. Another advantage is that online programming relieves concerns about seating and room capacity. However, it must be replaced by formulating a detailed tech plan—from knowing who will admit participants and attend to safety (from Zoombombers, for instance), to assigning facilitators just to manage the chat and field questions. And strangely enough, as unwieldy as 200+ attendees might seem, using breakout rooms can also foster a sense of intimacy that might be harder to achieve in an actual room of 200+. We have been excited to find ways to celebrate BIPOC authors and illustrators and their work while also building new communities around children’s and young adult literature. We hope what these MLIS students have shared will inspire readers to tap your rich community resources and host your own Read-In of whatever size and scope works best for you. If you do host an African American Read-In we’d love to hear about it!

(mhmarti@uw.edu) 

NOTES


1 While we acknowledge WeNeedDiverseBooks’ announcement on June 6, 2021 has stopped using the term #OwnVoices in favor of “specific descriptions that authors use for themselves and their characters whenever possible,” we use it here for the sake of brevity while also honoring the spirit of this NCTE event that celebrates African American creators. (<https://diversebooks.org/why-we-need-diverse-books-is-no-longer-using-the-term-ownvoices/>).

- Trauma-informed care
- Pandemic re-entry anxiety
- Handling conflict and unpleasant conversations
- Breathing and mindfulness activities to manage stress

Reflection and Conclusion

While the full extent of the success of our approach has yet to be measured, we have seen promising signs of its impact on our staff community. Since implementing our community of care approach and including our Tri-Campus colleagues, our newsletter outreach model is already being workshopped by our institutional DEI working groups, staff have reported greater comfort during this pandemic with engaging users about violations of campus Covid-19 policies, and supervisors have permanently included our tools and resources in their unit training plans for both student and full-time employees. This success is promising, and an indication to us of the utility of our approach.

We hope that this reflection, both on the nature of LibCares and some of the strategies we employed, could serve as a springboard for other libraries and library types to create similar communities of practice. We are happy to answer your questions.

Our thanks go out to all the former and current members of LibCares and the Safety and Security Team which was the precursor to LibCares, including: Adam Hall, Alena Wolotira, Bryna Lieberman, David Frappier, Elliott Stevens, Emilie Vrbancic, Frank Stieber, Heather Cyre, Jenny Mount, Jinny Sanders, Johanna Jacobsen Kiciman, Lani Tyler, Liana Diga, Mariel Pachucki, Nan Holmes, Ruba Sadi, Stephen Weber, Whitney Buccicone. A special and heartfelt thanks goes to Chelle Batchelor who organized and charged this group of individuals after leading that first fateful meeting discussing harassment in the library workspace. Without their emotional labor, collegiality and friendship, and participation in our community of practice, the group would not have been the same. Thank you. 

NOTES

1 American Libraries Magazine. “Stop Sexual Harassment in Your Library,” November 1, 2017. <https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2017/11/01/stop-sexual-harassment-your-library>.

2 What is a community of practice? Community of Practice. (n.d.). Retrieved December 3, 2021, from <https://www.communityofpractice.ca/background/what-is-a-community-of-practice>.

Ode to Community College Transfer Students

by Christy McDaniel

Dear transfer students,

I want you to know that you are the bomb. You may feel like you don't belong, or don't know enough, but you do belong. You do know enough.

You know to ask for help during week three instead of week nine. And you know that the best way to ask for help is to explain what you know and where you got stuck. Or to try and create something yourself and then bring it to someone for feedback.

You know Proquest, or Ebsco. Our "600 research databases" are just Proquest and Ebsco in different outfits.

You say you don't know primary from secondary sources, or popular from scholarly from grey literature, but in asking your question you end up explaining it correctly nearly every time.

You know that trying something different is as simple as clicking a different button, trying a different keyword, and asking for help on 24-7 chat.

You know to look around for available resources before opening your wallet to pay for something.

Is there a stigma you're carrying about community college? I implore you to kick it to the curb. That stigma is BS.

You are prepared for this place. You belong here. You can succeed. 📖

Sincerely,

Your University Librarian



Photo by [Pang Yuhao](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Christy McDaniel is the Engineering and Science Librarian at the University of Washington Tacoma Library. She loves spreadsheets, collection development, and helping students succeed.

WLA Scholarship Winners: A Recognition

by the Alki Editorial Committee

Every year, the WLA awards a number of scholarships to members within our community. These WLA scholarships are memorial scholarships, created and funded by families and friends in memory of their loved ones to honor each person's service to libraries. On behalf of the WLA Professional Development Committee, we're excited to announce the winners of the 2021 WLA Scholarships!

- Alex Grennan – Maryan E. Reynolds Scholarship
- Maina Gachugu – Maryan E. Reynolds Scholarship
- Cindy Garcia Rivas – Maryan E. Reynolds Scholarship
- Sharon Millett – Hahn-Ahlers Continuing Education Scholarship
- Heather Christofferson – Denny Bond Library Paraprofessional Scholarship
- Christine Lu – John Stanford Continuing Education Scholarship; LISS COVID-19 Emergency Scholarship; WALE Continuing Education Scholarship
- Megan Rosenfeld – WALE Continuing Education Scholarship

While we would normally have celebrated these amazing people in person at the annual conference, we are virtually celebrating by offering a chance for you to get to know about your colleagues here, through their own voices. We reached out to everyone; here are the responses we received. Enjoy!

Heather Christofferson

Thank you so much for bringing a little hope into my life! I am Heather Christofferson, a fourth generation library fanatic. I have worked for the Washougal School District for over 25 years in various paraprofessional positions and school locations. For the last five of those I have been at Hathaway Elementary as a Library 1 Assistant / Library Media Instructor. I have a passion for helping students expand their view, embrace children's literature, and love sharing my curiosity and research skills. Knowing a little bit about a lot of things makes the library the perfect spot for me.

Winning this scholarship gives me hope of attaining my teaching certification or expanding my knowledge and skills for helping our students thrive.

To me being a member of WLA is all about connections. Connections in knowledge, state and local support, expands our personal umbrellas to share and help each other improve our programs.

I am still looking for the right college that will take a chance on an older student and work with me to fulfill my dream of being a "real librarian." In the meantime, I am content to know that this scholarship will help me with another step to achieving this goal.

In the spirit of sharing, check out our [website](#)—copy and use any resources here. Artists do it and we can too! It is constantly being updated and changing as free resources often become not free. Hope to connect with more of you in the future.



Image courtesy of Heather Christofferson

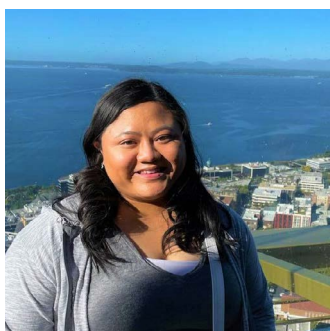


Image courtesy of Christine Lu



Image courtesy of Sharon Millett



Image courtesy of Megan Rosenfeld

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Cindy Garcia Rivas

I moved to Washington State about a year ago and am working on my MLIS at the University of South Carolina as a distance learner. This fall, I began working as a library assistant at the Sylvan Way branch of Kitsap Regional Library and have had a great time getting to know the community here. I hope to work with the public as a librarian, whether that be at a public library or community college.

Winning this scholarship has greatly eased my financial burden for my last few semesters, as I am only two classes away from completing my degree.

As someone who is not originally from this area and did not go to library school here, I knew I needed to put effort into networking. WLA events and newsletters are most relevant to me because they are local. I attended several Career Lab sessions, during which I heard from employees at institutions I was interested in working in. The job listings and listserv updates have also given me insight into the inner workings of these places.

Christine Lu

I am attending San Jose State University, and working towards my MLIS. I am taking classes fully online, which allows me to juggle school, work, and family. I am interested in public librarianship and administration. My local library is the Seattle Public Library.

I am ecstatic to have been given this opportunity to be awarded this scholarship and continue my education. With this scholarship, it is very helpful in easing my financial burden and pursue my interests and passions.

What I enjoy most about being a WLA member is the ability to access the plethora of resources available. I enjoy having the yearly WLA conference, as well as reading the WLA newsletters via emails, for any updates and interesting information.

Thank you so much for this opportunity! I am grateful for this scholarship especially during this pandemic, where it has been a financial strain.

Sharon Millett

I am a second-year graduate student in the School of Library and Information Management (SLIM) program at Emporia State University in the Oregon Cohort. I work for the Hoh Tribe in Forks, Washington as the manager of the Tribal Library. I also work in youth prevention. I am married with two daughters and a menagerie of pets!

I am very honored to win this scholarship! I received my B.A. in Elementary Education almost 30 years ago and I had wished to pursue a master's degree in library science for some time. Receiving this scholarship validates my decision to further my education.

As the only employee in a very rural library, WLA connects me with other library professionals and provides information and training that has helped me immensely in my career. Until beginning graduate work, much of my knowledge was self-taught and acquired with the help of WLA. I am very thankful and appreciative of the Washington Library Association!

Megan Rosenfeld

I am a third year online MLIS student at the University of Washington, with an interest in special libraries. My focus for this year is my Capstone project, which will be related to the intersection of librarianship and copyright, a topic that is also the focus of my current independent study. Outside of being a student, I work part time for the King County Library System and spend any rare free time cuddling with my two cats.

Like many, the pandemic has affected my life in numerous ways. I left a second job to pursue substitute shifts at KCLS in January of 2020, only to have that opportunity be taken away by the pandemic. This scholarship allows me to focus a little more on school as I work on my Capstone, and gives me just enough room to not take another job to continue to cover living expenses.

It's a small thing, but the weekly newsletters on Wednesdays are my favorite part of being a WLA member. They keep me current on happenings in Washington State, alert me of any important events or deadlines, and allow me to see what careers my path could take me on here at home. I look forward to seeing those in my inbox every week!

As President for the student chapter of ALA at University of Washington, I am a huge advocate for students joining professional organizations such as WLA. The association helps me to appreciate the incredible community I am joining by pursuing my MLIS! 📖

Milestones

Milestones focuses on significant moments for libraries statewide – recognizing notable new hires, transitions, expansions and retirements, as well as remembrances of those who have passed. We're looking for submissions, of approximately 250 words, that highlight notable accomplishments in the careers of those profiled. Photographs are encouraged. Please send information to alkieditor@wla.org.

A Forty Year Farewell to Nancy Minton

This is a goodbye and thank you to the WLA organization and my WLA colleagues. I retired on Wednesday, Oct. 6th after 40 years of employment with Seattle University's School of Law Library. It has been great being part of an ever changing and interesting information field! In time I hope to join "Friends of the Library," but in the immediate future I'll focus on simply being a retiree.

To say that WLA has enriched my professional life is an understatement. Over the years, I was lucky to chair WLA's SRRT committee and participate in other interest groups and divisions. I found helping create relevant conference programs rewarding. Having the opportunity to volunteer at conferences gave me a deep appreciation for WLA leaders who make our organization run so efficiently and successfully. I reaped terrific work connections and lasting friendships via WLA. The knowledge I shared with my institution through my WLA involvement has enhanced our library immeasurably.

As I retire, I will most definitely encourage my library's staff and librarians to join and participate in WLA's divisions and interest groups. The best to all of you and my sincere thanks.

Content courtesy of Nancy Minton.

Dean of University Libraries



Simon Neame was named the new dean of University Libraries on June 7, 2021 and began his appointment September 1, 2021. As dean, he leads a network of 16 academic research libraries across all three University of Washington campuses and the University of Washington Press.

Simon Neame brings a wealth of experience in digitization, open access, and preservation of special collections. From 2016-2021, he served as the dean of Libraries at the University of Massachusetts Amherst where he led the W.E.B. Du Bois Library, the Science and Engineering Library and the Wadsworth Library on the Mount Ida campus. Prior to the University of Massachusetts Amherst, he was the associate university librarian and director of the Irving K. Barber Learning Centre at the University of British Columbia's Vancouver campus where he was responsible for the humanities and social sciences library, the health sciences library, and several subject libraries. In these leadership roles, he has demonstrated a commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion, engaging communities, opening access to research, and building partnerships while underscoring the important role university libraries play in student success.

He has led a number of initiatives aimed at preserving Indigenous knowledge and amplifying the voices and stories of underrepresented communities through digitization programs, such as his work with the archives of civil rights activist and writer W.E.B. Du Bois. Simon's own research explores the intersection between libraries and museums, and opportunities for integration across collections through open discovery systems.

Born in Vancouver, British Columbia, he holds a bachelor's degree in English and history from the University of Victoria and a master of library and information studies from the University of British Columbia.

Content courtesy of the University of Washington Libraries. 📖

I'd Rather Be Reading

by Emily Calkins

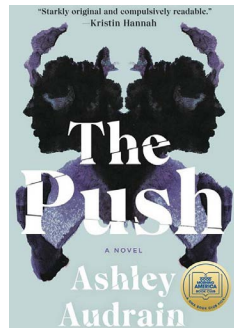


Book Group Conversations

This summer, I trained the volunteers who lead the 30+ book groups at the King County Library System. Much of our time together focused on creating welcoming, inclusive, and dynamic conversations inspired by the group's monthly reading choice. To that end, this month's column highlights books, both fiction and nonfiction, that should inspire critical book group conversations.

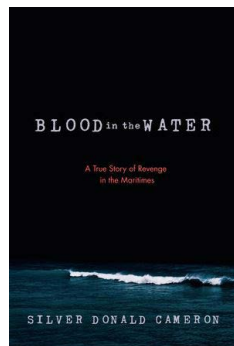
The Push by Ashley Audrain.

For groups that prefer a plot-driven read, Audrain's buzzy debut is an excellent choice. Blythe is a woman with a traumatic family past who struggles to connect with her newborn daughter, Violet. When Violet is at the scene of a tragic accident, Blythe begins to suspect that Violet may have been involved. The people around her ignore her suspicions, and she descends into paranoia as her marriage falls apart. An ambiguous ending and an unreliable narrator provide great fuel for a compelling conversation.



Blood in the Water by Silver David Cameron.

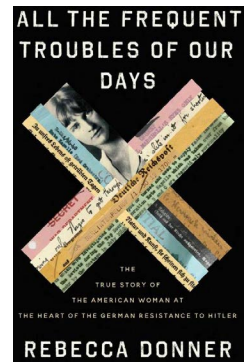
Cameron's fascinating true crime narrative chronicles the death of a notorious thief and community troublemaker in a small coastal community. Phillip Boudreau routinely stole from the lobster traps of other fishermen in the community, threatening their livelihoods. The morning that he was killed by the crew on another fishing boat, they suspected he was thieving again. A glowing Publishers Weekly review noted that the book "explores the morality of taking the law into one's own hands" and called it "an instant true crime classic."



Emily Calkins is formerly the readers' services program coordinator for the King County Library System. Currently, she is a pop culture curator for the recommendation app Likewise. You can reach her at emilycalkins@gmail.com.

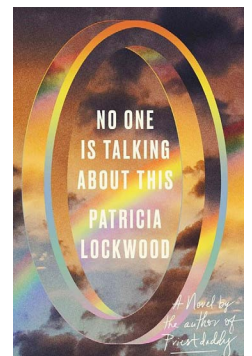
All The Frequent Troubles of Our Days: The American Woman at The Heart of the German Resistance to Hitler by Rebecca Donner.

In 1943, American academic Mildred Harnack and her German husband were executed by the Nazi government for their resistance activities. In this history, Donner recounts Harnack's life, with a focus on the events and choices that led to her role in the resistance and eventual execution. For book groups that have been devouring the recent glut of WWII fiction, this nonfiction counterpoint should generate rich compare-and-contrast discussions.



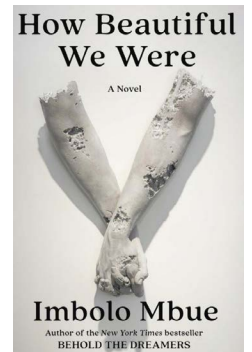
No One Is Talking About This by Patricia Lockwood.

This timely and experimental work of autofiction captures the experience of being very present online in a unique and visceral way. Lockwood's wry protagonist spends all her time on the portal, a sort of Twitter stand-in where she is famous for one viral post. Fragmentary observations, frequent references to pop culture and current events, and sharp musing about the strangeness of social media form the novel's first half. In its second, the protagonist's family is struck by a wrenching tragedy. Even as it becomes deeply moving, the book never loses its weirdness. It may be divisive, but sometimes divisive books lead to the best conversations.



How Beautiful We Were by Imbolo Mbue.

Mbue's impressive sophomore novel chronicles the environmental devastation experienced by a fictional African village at the hands of the American oil corporation drilling nearby. The story, which spans decades, offers plenty of fodder for discussion, as the villagers resort to desperate measures to protect their home. The complex storytelling, which features a range of voices, some of them collective, should also inspire conversation.



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Read This Book! News and Opinions by Teacher-Librarians

Books for Native American Heritage Month—And Beyond

by Eve Datisman

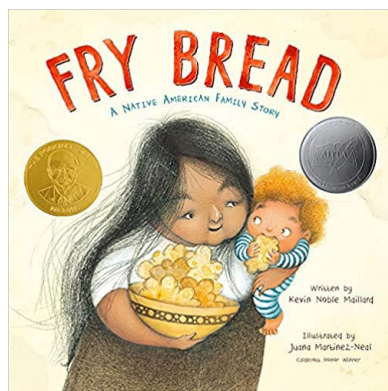
The members of Puget Sound Council for the Review of Children's and Young Adult Literature live and work on the ancestral lands of Nooksack, Upper Skagit Lummi, Samish, Swinomish Stillaguamish, Tulalip, Snoqualmie, Muckleshoot, Duwamish, Puyallup, Suquamish, Port Gamble S'Klallam, Jamestown S'Klallam, Lower Elwha Clallam, Makah, Quileute, Hoh, and Quinault tribal lands. Many of the places where we live, work, hike, fish, swim, plant gardens, and learn honor the indigenous connections across Washington. Many schools have a curriculum that fosters deep learning and respect and support for Native cultures and languages and particularizes their histories and present and futures. But more can and needs to be done to acknowledge past harms, and to move towards action and accountability.

November is Native American Heritage Month. With that in mind, the members of Puget Sound Council invite you to read, share, and celebrate these books: now, and all the time!

Fry Bread

Author: Kevin Noble Maillard. Illustrator: Juana Martinez-Neal
Highly Recommended for All grades
Reviewed by Teresa Bateman, Retired Teacher-Librarian at Brigadoon and Olympic View Elementaries, and author of *Job Wanted*, *The Bully Blockers Club*, and soon, *Mitzi and the Big Bad Nosy Wolf: A Digital Citizenship Story*.

This book is getting a lot of well-deserved press as it provides a lyrical homage to a Native American food through an exploration of foodways. The author provides detailed imagery as readers can feel the soft dough, hear the oil sizzle, smell the bread cooking, and taste it as it melts on



Eve Datisman is a retired Teacher-Librarian for Port Angeles High School and currently the cataloger for North Olympic History Center. She is learning about migrating a museum collection to an online platform and taking a deep dive into authority files and naming conventions, because sometimes a pestle is not a pestle, and she needs to know how to create an authority file for someone called by 14 different names, none of them inappropriate.

the tongue. This is a family affair—a cooking event that unites kin with one another, and with their ancestors. The main part of the book is wonderfully evocative, and the end pages provide further insights about issues facing Native Americans—extending the text and providing context, as well as additional information about what is in the illustrations. Caldecott Honor winner Juana Martinez-Neal's gorgeous acrylic and colored pencil illustrations are truly spectacular. Put that text with those pictures and you've got a winner.

Ancestor Approved: Intertribal Stories for Kids

Editor: Cynthia Leitich Smith

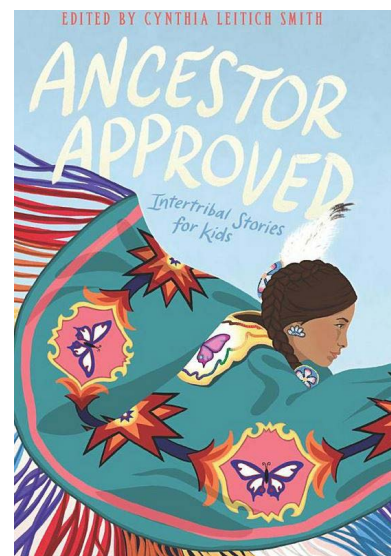
Illustrator: Michaela Goade

Highly Recommended for grades 5-8

Reviewed by Erin O'Connor, Teacher-Librarian at Kellogg Middle School

This is a fictional anthology written by a number of Indigenous authors. The book focuses on different aspects of Native life, and all of the stories are connected by the fact that the characters are attending the same large powwow. Some of their experiences intersect at the powwow and some do not. The middle-school aged characters vary from the adopted child exploring their Native identity because they were adopted by white folks,

to the character who misses their older sister when she goes off to college and is all of a sudden consumed by the climate catastrophe, to the child who has a Native stepdad who is teaching them to dance in regalia at the powwow for the first time. It is a wonderful collection of stories that will be a mirror for Native students, and a window for others, into the beautiful culture and community, hardships, resilience, and hope of the First Nations communities in the United States and Canada. Some of the authors included are Eric Gansworth (*Apple, Skin to the Core, Give Me Some Truth*), Tim Tingle (*How I Became a Ghost, When a Ghost Talks*), Christine Day (*I Can Make This Promise, The Sea in Winter*),



continued on next page

Cynthia Leitich Smith (*Hearts Unbroken*), and Carole Lindstrom (*We Are Water Protectors*).

We are still Here! Native American Truths that Everyone Should Know

Author: Tracy Sorell

Illustrator: Fané Lessac

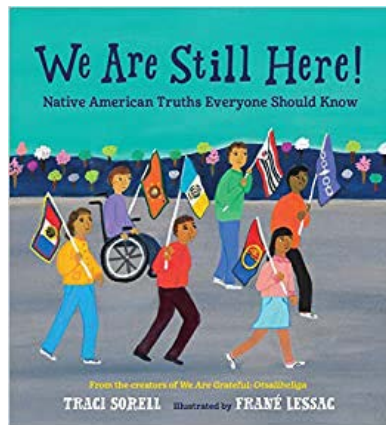
Highly recommended for Everyone

Reviewed by Eve Datisman

Although the target audience is grades 2-5, this book is for anyone looking for an introduction to the effect of the U.S. government policies on Native Americans from the late 1800's to the present.

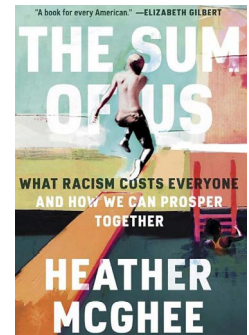
It's Indigenous Peoples' Day Presentation Night at Native Nations School.

Twelve kids, from various nations and tribes present historical and contemporary laws, policies, struggles, and victories in Native American life. Each voice speaking ends with the refrain: We are still here. Beginning in 1871 (when treaties stopped being created), the students tell the particularized stories of their peoples moving through historical wrongs to emphasizing contemporary strength, community, and joy. Topics covered include assimilation, allotment, Indian New Deal, termination, relocation, tribal activism, self-determination, Indian Child welfare and education, religious freedom, economic development, language revival, and sovereign resurgence. Each topic has a two page spread filled with warm gouache illustrations that support the historical context while personalizing the contemporary setting. Throughout the book the message—Native people are still here!—is reinforced. This is an essential resource to introduce the impact laws had and continue to have on Native Nations. It includes a glossary, timeline, sources, and author's note. 📖



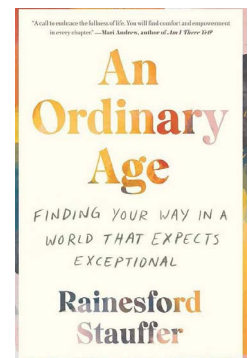
The Sum of Us by Heather McGhee.

McGhee is an expert in economics and social policy, and her expertise gives this anti-racist book a unique point of view. She explores the cost of white supremacy for society at large and looks at the enormous power of the myth that improving life for people of color comes at a cost for white people. One succinct example: when public pools were desegregated, there were white communities that chose to close their pools entirely, depriving the entire community of a pool. McGhee's National Book Award finalist is deeply researched, clearly written, practical yet heartfelt, and will jump start critical, necessary community conversations.



An Ordinary Age by Rainesford Stauffer.

A journalist explores coming-of-age for Millennials and Gen Z, with a focus on the rhetoric of "best life" and the conflict between that aspirational messaging and economic, cultural, and social forces that have shaped the transition to adulthood for recent generations. The book combines elements of memoir with text from hundreds of interviews. Stauffer's compassionate, thoughtful interrogation of modern young adulthood should inspire reflection in readers of all ages. 📖





Realistic Subject Headings for 2021

Challenges—TikTok, social media

see also:

Tide Pods
Cinnamon
Milk Crates
Cheering Crowd
Reese's Puffs

Challenges—Librarianship

see also:

High Staff Turnover Rate
Low Morale Experiences
Early Retirements
Budget Cuts
Failed Library Bonds
Cutting School Librarians
Failure of Administrations to Adequately
Protect Staff

Challenges—Book and Political

see also:

Targeting Books by LGBTQ+ Authors
Targeting Authors of Color
Book Banning by People Who Don't Read
American History



Photo by [Jen Theodore](#) on [Unsplash](#).

WLA Thanks Our Organizational Members

Organizational Members

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Community Colleges of Spokane - Library Services	Ritzville Library District #2
Eastern Washington University Libraries	San Juan Island Library
Ellensburg Public Library	Seattle Central College Library
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