

ALSC Matters

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Officially Speaking

A Season in Transition

I am now in the second quarter of my year as your ALSC President—the autumn quarter, if you will. These months are filled with lots of learning, of course—I started this autumn with the joy and honor of traveling to Kansas City, Missouri, for the biennial ALSC National Institute. The Institute was a packed three days of connections, learning, and exploring new ideas, and I returned to my library feeling invigorated and inspired.

These months are also filled with lots of looking ahead. There's the imminent announcement of the 2023 slate of candidates to serve on the ALSC Board of Directors. I personally am very passionate about helping members to see themselves as strong association leaders—that's a topic that will be woven into my ALSC President's Program to take place at the ALA Annual Conference in June in Chicago (sneak peek!). There's also in-progress strategic planning for ALSC, which the Board of Directors is undertaking this year. Input from many members and other children's library folks is at the center of our strategic planning process, and I want to give a massive thank you to ALSC members Joanna Fabicon, Lucia Gonzalez, Hanna Lee, Jonda McNair, Mary-Kate Sableski, and Eva Thaler-Sroussi who have facilitated community conversations as part of this process.

Before we know it, it will be the LibLearnX Conference in New Orleans, Louisiana, at the end of January. In addition to being the venue for lots of great professional development and learning, the LibLearnX event includes the annual Youth Media Awards announcements. I look forward to seeing many ALSC members and children's literature champions in that room as we celebrate great works for children and the important, dedicated work of the committee members who select the award recipients and create our notables lists.

Committees and Appointments. Curious about the ongoing process of committee appointments? Autumn is the time for awards and notables appointments so that committee members are in place at the start of the new calendar year. At the time I am writing this column in mid-October, the appointments advisory working group, of which I am at the head as your current president, is hard at work on sorting through interested and eligible members so that we can appoint balanced committees for the important ALSC awards and notables work. Strong committees include members with a variety of experiences and perspectives—that is, folks with different types and amounts of media evaluation experience; veteran and first-time committee members; folks from different types, sizes, and locations of libraries; and folks from a variety of backgrounds and cultural groups, including historically marginalized people groups. It has been one of the privileges of my term as ALSC President thus far to pilot this appointments advisory working group process, which moving forward is the standard process for all committee appointments.

If you're interested in process committee work, it's always a good time to [submit your volunteer form!](#) There are always mid-term committee vacancies—the sort that arise when committee members' circumstances change and they are no longer able to complete a term. Those mid-term vacancies create an opportunity for another member to get involved. When a committee vacancy arises, I often check in with the co-chairs to find out whether any interested members have been observing online committee meetings. That's something any member can do! Committee chairs post notices and agendas for their upcoming meetings in the [ALSC Community Space on ALA Connect](#), with an invitation for any interested members to attend. Sitting in on process committee meetings can be a great way to get a taste of the types of work you would find engaging as a committee volunteer. The annual process committee appointments process—in which half of all committee members are appointed—will start up again in late winter, with service terms beginning July 1, 2023. Current Vice President Jonda McNair will be working with a group of members to advise on those appointments throughout the spring.

In This Issue. As we find ourselves firmly in the fall and winter months here in the northern hemisphere, I invite you to warm up with a Bright Ideas story that harkens back to summer fun at the library: Gail Borden Public Library's (Elgin, IL) Wizard of Oz Educational Exhibit, an interactive fantasy-adventure based on the movie classic, which brought the colorful Land of Oz, Munchkinland, and The Emerald City to children and families this summer. This section also includes information on a groundbreaking, new tool from First Book & Susan Neuman for assessing and bolstering classroom libraries.

There are always great opportunities to learn and build skills for your work in this newsletter, too. I hope you've been following our Competencies in Action columns, in which a library practitioner delves into one particular area of ALSC's Core Competencies to provide valuable, real-world context and examples. In this issue, Justin Azevedo, youth materials selector at Sacramento Public Library, digs into Competency IV. Collection Knowledge and Management. This competency is a vital one at any time, but particularly relevant given the recent increase of challenges to library materials across the United States.

And don't miss the Hear Ye! section this month for news from the field and resources you can use, including information from ALA on 2022 book bans, grant/award opportunities from ALSC, First Nation Communities READ titles for children, and more.—*Amy Koester, ALSC President*

Gratitude

Dear ALSC Members,

First, I'd like to thank all of you for having the confidence in me to select me as the current ALSC vice president and soon-to-be president. I am truly grateful. In the days and weeks after the election results were announced, I received many emails from ALSC members congratulating me and, even more importantly, informing me that I had their support in whatever ways were necessary. Those emails meant so much to me and let me know that ALSC members “have my back.”

I joined ALSC in 2005, and since that time, I have benefited in numerous ways, personally and professionally. One of the highlights was serving as chair of the 2021 John Newbery Award Selection Committee. I am also thankful for friendships and solid relationships with ALSC members such as librarians, authors, illustrators, publishers, art directors, and editors. These friendships and relationships have supported me as a reader, journal editor, scholar of children's literature, and teacher. When I think of all that ALSC has given to me, I am reminded that “to whom much is given, much is required.” I think of this phrase now as I learn alongside ALSC President Amy Koester and prepare for my term as president.

One of the challenges of learning this new position is that ALSC is doing so much good work—from grants and fellowships, to our many book awards and process committees, to partnerships with various organizations. I see the almost daily ALA Connect postings related to various committees and marvel at all the hard work taking place. I thank all of you for your efforts.

Speaking of committees, as vice president/president-elect, I serve on the ALSC Budget Committee, and Immediate Past President Lucia Gonzalez and I have been tasked with writing blog posts about the different ways members have benefited from receiving ALSC funding. Please email me (mcnair.7@osu.edu) if you would like to share your story about receiving ALSC funding and how this has supported you, a program, or a special project.

Soon, I will begin the appointing process and look forward to reading and sorting through the volunteer forms that I hope many of you have submitted. Remember that the volunteer forms can be submitted at any time of the year, but it is recommended for process committees to submit the forms between September and January and for award and evaluation committees to submit between May and July. You can find the form at this link: [ALSC Committee Volunteer Form](#).

Finally, I love the city of New Orleans! It offers good food and music, and with us in town January 27–30, 2023, for ALA's LibLearnX 2023, there will be good books, too. I always enjoy attending the Youth Media Awards ceremony, and I look forward to seeing many of you in person again at LibLearnX 2023.—*In gratitude, Jonda C. McNair, ALSC Vice President/President-Elect, 2022–2023, Charlotte S. Huck Endowed Professor of Children's Literature, The Ohio State University*

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ALSC Voices

ALSC Profile

Celebrating colleagues with 25 years or more years of ALSC membership

Maida Wong
Public Services Manager
South Pasadena Public Library
Pasadena, California

ALSC Membership: 25 years

Where did you attend library school?

I attended the University of Denver.

What was your very first library position?

My very first library position was as an intern in Children's Services with the Stockton-San Joaquin County Public Library system. After library school, my first professional library position was Assistant Librarian at Loyola High School.

What do you love most about your current job?

What I love most about my current job is working with the public and hearing their appreciation for the services, programs, and resources that we provide. I get less of that in my current position than I got when I specifically worked in Children's Services. Now I get to collaborate with our team to determine how and what services, programs, and resources to offer.

Do you have any pets?

I have a 14-year old German Shepherd mix who stars in my husband's silly Underachieving Asian videos. My daughter adds the dog's snarky sidebar commentary, so our dog is definitely the reason to tune in. She's very loyal and protective of us, which translates to being not dog or other people friendly. But in the last six months, she has made a friend with my other daughter's puppy, which shows that an old dog can learn new tricks.

What do you remember about your favorite teacher?

My favorite teacher held high expectations of her students. She wasn't popular and didn't follow the latest trends. She recognized and encouraged students who might have otherwise been overlooked. She had a strong sense of fairness, which was important to fifth graders. And she promoted reading, which, of course, influenced my life's direction.

What was your favorite thing to play with when you were a child?

When I was a child, we had a lot of unstructured, unsupervised play time. We rode in the dark of night playing bike tag in the neighborhood. We made stick dolls with flower dresses and created little worlds for them with leaves and rocks and other natural materials (in the spirit of Cooney's Roxaboxen). We learned a lot of independence from solving problems without adult oversight.

Bright Ideas

Traveling Along the Yellow Brick Road to the Library

Hosting large, museum-quality exhibits has been an effective way for Gail Borden Public Library in Elgin, Illinois, to bring literacy to its community. The exhibits bring people into the library with the goal of transforming them into regular library users. This year, the library also wanted to use a special exhibit to bring people back to the library after the pandemic.

The Wizard of Oz™ Educational Exhibit from the Miami Children's Museum and Warner Bros. was the perfect exhibit to bring people back. On display from May to August, the exhibit drew people from the community and Chicago area along with visitors from Canada, Arizona, and Texas. It increased the number of library visitors but also ignited the imagination of those participating in summer reading, a community-wide scavenger hunt and other fun library programs.

Based on the 1939 movie starring Judy Garland, the interactive, 2,500-square-foot exhibit showcased Munchkinland, the Witch's Castle, Emerald City, and more along with elements of the movie including Dorothy's Ruby Slippers, characters from the film, and classic movie moments. A giant set of blow-up witch legs reminiscent of the fate of the unfortunate Wicked Witch of the East in the movie were attached to the outside of the library building. They garnered lots of laughs and double-takes from people walking and driving by.

From opening day on, the community truly connected with the exhibit. After only three days of the exhibit opening, the Library received more than 260 comments on Facebook including:

- We just left, it was super cool!
- We went today and loved it! We definitely plan to go back a couple more times before the exhibit leaves.

- Thoroughly enjoyed today with my grandson. Thank you, Gail Borden.
- Went there! Super cool!
- This is amazing!!!

The number of library visitors increased from the year before during all four months of the exhibit. A 38.51% increase in visitors was seen in May and a 47.28% increase in June. Checkouts for youth printed materials increased during the exhibit, particularly in May with a 32% increase, a good indication that many kids were continuing to read over the summer.

The library was fortunate to have many partners supporting the exhibit and related programs including the Gail Borden Public Library District Foundation, a local credit union and bank along with many businesses that participated in the There's No Place Like Home: Follow the Yellow Brick Road Scavenger Hunt. Families visited 31 locations in the community with the help of a map provided by the library. Each location had its own "secret" Oz word that would be revealed with a QR code. Those who found ten secret words received a Wizard of Oz backpack; a water bottle and a chance to win a Wizard of Oz gift basket were awarded to those who found all 31 words.

Using QR codes to track participation helped us ascertain community involvement. We discovered that QR codes at the 31 scavenger hunt locations were scanned 3,500 times for the secret Oz words. The scavenger hunt served several purposes—it brought people to businesses and the library, it helped promote the exhibit, and it was a reminder for the community to participate in summer reading.

The Follow the Yellow Brick Road—READ! Summer Reading Challenge 2022 at the library incorporated the Oz theme. The library's graphic artists designed the summer reading log to resemble the journey along the yellow brick road. The log was added as an insert to the library's May/June print newsletter, which is mailed to about 55,000 homes.

Several summer programs were based on Oz as well, including an interactive movie for kids who used props such as a rubber witch's finger, ribbon wand, bubbles, and more throughout the movie—a kid version of Rocky Horror Picture Show audience participation. The library's annual community read program offered books with the theme of characters going on a journey in search of themselves or loved ones. Finding Dorothy by Elizabeth Letts was checked out hundreds of times over the summer.

Library visitors had fun at a Wizard of Oz photo op created by the library that offered several different backgrounds. Visitors took 5,326 photos of just themselves or with friends and family. Of those, 3,806 of the photos were shared via social media, helping to get the word out about the Library and exhibit!

The City of Elgin supported the exhibit by naming its 4th of July parade "There Is No Place Like Home." Some of the Library's Foundation and Board members appeared on an Oz-themed float. One Board member wowed onlookers with his scarecrow costume and dance moves modeled on Scarecrow in the movie.

The exhibit was featured in several local newspapers including the Daily Herald and The Elgin Courier-News and even featured in a segment on Chicago WGN-TV Channel 9 news. After reading about the exhibit, a resident of a nearby town reached out and lent items from her private collection of Oz memorabilia. The items rekindled people's childhood memories and the collection was highlighted in local newspapers, bringing the exhibit even more attention.

The Wizard of Oz™ Educational Exhibit gave the gift of magic to the community, bringing home the message that “There’s no place like the Library.”—*Liz Clemmons, director of communications, Gail Borden Public Library, Elgin, Illinois*

First Book and Researcher Susan Neuman Launch Classroom Library Tool

[First Book](#), the largest online network of educators serving children in need, in partnership with literacy expert and education researcher Susan Neuman, recently launched a new tool to assess and bolster the quality and equity of classroom libraries. The [Literacy Rich Classroom Library Checklist](#) offers a complete assessment of a classroom library's book collection and design features to maximize student engagement and ensure the inclusion of equitable resources that reflect the needs and interests of children in need. Classroom libraries that meet their full potential in supporting student learning take into account the presentation of the physical space, the quantity, quality, and diversity of books offered, and the frequency of use.

Informing this assessment tool and accompanying its launch, First Book [released the findings of a survey](#) of more than 1,200 educators nationwide. The study reveals the costly and time-consuming process of building a literacy rich environment, considering nearly all educators (96%) are responsible for supplying some or all of the books and learning materials in their classroom libraries. On average, educators pay \$346 out of their own pocket on books and materials in a typical year, and it takes nearly half of educators (47%) more than 6 years to build their classroom library. For many, these classroom libraries were decimated as educators gave out books to remedy students' limited access to physical books as they transitioned to remote learning during the pandemic. As educators look to rebuild and strengthen their classroom libraries, especially those in low-income communities and Title I schools, it is essential to evaluate the literacy rich nature of these libraries to offer an equitable selection of resources to engage and capture the minds of our youngest readers in low-income communities.

"As we emerge from a pandemic that has shuttered libraries and severed access to high-quality books, classroom libraries will be the linchpin in reigniting student passion for reading," says Susan Neuman, professor of teaching and learning at New York University. "There is a science to creating a classroom library that expands beyond the simple presence of books. With the guide of the Literacy Rich Classroom Library Checklist, we have provided a research-driven roadmap for educators to foster an environment that invites students, offers high-quality books and resources, and cultivates a love for reading that will drive equitable education outcomes and be foundational for future success."

The development of the Literacy Rich Classroom Library Checklist empowers educators to self-evaluate classrooms and better ensure high-quality, diverse resources that bolster libraries and support a more equitable education for all. The complete First Book Accelerator resource further supports the 96 percent of educators who have personally funded some or all of their classroom library books by offering a crowd-sourced toolkit that includes insights on self-advocating for classroom funding.

As a result of this research, First Book will fund 200 classroom libraries across the country in an effort to strengthen student access to high-quality, diverse books and to support educators who have gone above and beyond to establish and fund the development of literacy rich environments.

The Literacy Rich Classroom Library Checklist is the product of a comprehensive research effort, conducted by First Book and Susan Neuman. The [quantitative and qualitative undertaking](#) included

a literature review, field research, and a nationwide educator survey to refine and optimize the classroom library evaluation tool, incorporating feedback and insights from educators serving children in need in Title I schools. The resulting resources have already been well-received by the educators in our survey who used it to assess their own classroom libraries. The survey indicated that 78% of educators found the checklist very or extremely useful in defining what makes a classroom library or reading area "literacy rich." These free resources and the comprehensive research results can be found at firstbook.org.

Competencies in Action

Collection Knowledge and Management: Diversity vs. Divisiveness

by Justin Azevedo, Youth Materials Selector, Sacramento Public Library, and past co-chair of the ALSC Intellectual Freedom Committee

ALSC Competency IV - Collection Knowledge and Management - is, by definition, a broad and far-reaching concept. After all, knowledge of our collections is likely central to most of what we do in the library regardless of position and duties. I've been spending a lot of time lately considering two subsections in particular: maintaining a diverse collection and advocating for materials by and about underrepresented communities. Both of those concepts are inherently related and are also directly connected to another part of the competency that most of us are worrying about an awful lot these days: responding to material challenges.

In 2019, I served on a task force to revise and recreate what would eventually be renamed the [Diverse Collections](#) interpretation of the ALA Library Bill of Rights. This interpretation was always meant to specifically address the maintenance of diverse collections, but it had previously been focused almost entirely on protecting collections from censorship, without much examination of the creation of those collections. While current events have shown us just how important vigilance against censorship is, they have also shown us how easily a nuance-free adherence to this approach can be weaponized against libraries. When we start thinking of collection management solely as hewing closely to criteria, defending what's already there, and avoiding criticism or controversy, we can get trapped into undermining our own work through chasing after balance rather than true diversity, and internalizing attacks on our own expertise.

Trying to create a "diverse" collection through indulging false equivalencies and arbitrary proportions between subjects or viewpoints introduces misinformation into our collections. Furthermore, operating as if we cannot exercise professional judgement on whether new material meets our selection criteria (or, crucially, whether existing material continues to meet them) ends up reproducing and reinforcing the same structural inequities that we're hoping to mitigate. Too often, we craft and interpret our criteria and policies with an underlying assumption of universal neutrality that doesn't actually address the needs and experiences of the kids and caregivers that use our libraries. That is exactly why we specifically emphasize advocating for marginalized communities—if we want to create a truly diverse collection, we first have to cultivate an intrinsic understanding of the power imbalances in both the communities we serve and the library institution with which we serve them, and seriously consider how overcoming barriers and facilitating access will subsequently require an engaged, individual approach rather than a generalized one. Through that work, we can build, maintain, and promote collections that are not only diverse, but much easier to defend against attacks on them (and, by proxy, the people they serve).

A thorough response to those attacks should rely on a strong and nuanced understanding of how and why the material is in the collection in the first place, and our policies should strive to reflect that.

Happily, the revised Library Bill of Rights interpretation now specifically encourages the very things we also see in this ALSC competency:

- Selecting content in multiple formats
- Seeking content created by and representative of marginalized and underrepresented groups
- Evaluating how diverse collection resources are cataloged, labeled, and displayed
- Including content in all of the languages used in the community that the library serves, when possible

In addition to identifying the general ways a collection can be made more inclusive, this framework helps us keep a clear head when faced with bad-faith accusations of “obscenity” or “divisiveness” simply for displaying a book that features an LGBTQ+ protagonist or recommending a factual accounting of racism. We should easily be able to understand and speak to how any given kids’ book in the collection authentically represents a perspective, experience, or viewpoint that a child or their caregiver would find relevant, in a format that is useful to them. But this also encourages us to consider and develop our collections independent of concerns about controversy. Protecting our collections from censorship is paramount, but it does not mean that we cannot be intentional and judicious in what we purchase, what we replace, and what we weed to make room for newer, more accurate, and more relevant materials within the same framework—in other words, appropriately managing our collections, as specified by this competency.

It’s a lot to think about, and the work is never done. A good library collection is a living organism, changing every day to respond to the changing needs of the community it serves. Exemplifying this particular competency involves speaking not just to how much you know about a particular collection, but about how much you know about the community it’s for, how much you’re still learning about both, and what you’re doing on that particular day to make the collection better as a result.

Hear Ye! Hear Ye!

Rivers Named ALSC Executive Director

Alena Rivers, with full support of the ALSC board of directors, has been named executive director of ALSC. Rivers began serving as ALSC interim executive director in September 2021, and has worked closely with the division's board of directors and members to ensure ALSC’s mission, programs, and services align with strategic goals. Rivers joined ALA in 2017 as ALSC deputy director, where she worked with staff, board, committees, and partners to support the division’s continued growth in member relations, communications, publications, continuing education, projects, grants, convenings, and symposia. Her work has included facilitating a division-wide collaboration on bystander intervention, implementation of the pilot ALSC Equity Fellowship, and execution of the pilot ALSC Research Agenda Grant. Rivers received a Master of Library and Information Science with a Certificate in Youth Services from Dominican University, where she served as a graduate assistant in the Butler Children’s Literature Center. Congratulations, Alena!

Grant Funds Available to Attend First ALA Conference

Will the 2023 ALA Annual Conference in Chicago be your first? If so, check out the [ALSC/Penguin Random House Young Readers Group Award](#). Made possible by an annual gift from Penguin Young Readers Group and Random House Children’s Books, the award provides a \$600 stipend to up to four children’s librarians to attend their first [ALA Annual Conference](#)! Find more details, including criteria and submission information on the [ALSC website](#). **Applications are due by December 31.**

Don't Wait! Nominate a Distinguished Colleague

ALSC is currently accepting nominations for the Distinguished Service Award (DSA), honoring an individual member of ALSC who has made significant contributions to, and an impact on, library service to children and the Association. The recipient receives \$2,000 and an engraved pin at the ALSC Membership Meeting during ALA Annual Conference. Complete information and the [nomination form are available on the DSA webpage](#). **Nominations are due December 9.**

2023 ALSC Election Slate Announced

In preparation for the spring 2023 elections, ALSC has posted its [slate of candidates](#) for leadership positions including Vice-President, division councilor, and three board directors. The website also includes important election dates and deadlines. For more information, visit <https://www.ala.org/alsc/aboutalsc/governance/election/2023-election>.

Dayton to Host Collier Lecture

ALSC's 2023 Children's Literature Lecture committee chose Dayton Metro Library and the University of Dayton, Ohio, as the site of the 2023 Children's Literature Lecture featuring writer and illustrator Bryan Collier.

"Dayton Metro Library and the University of Dayton are honored to have been selected to co-host the 2023 Children's Literature Lecture featuring Bryan Collier. We are looking forward to joining forces as a public library and an academic institution to create an experience that will appeal to those who study children's literature, those who share children's literature with young people, and those who simply enjoy children's literature themselves! Dayton, Ohio, is a conveniently located city within one day's drive of nearly 60 percent of the United States population, so we anticipate strong attendance from across the Midwest and beyond," said Allison Knight, youth services and programming director of the Dayton Metro Library.

The date and time of the lecture will be announced soon.

ALA Releases Preliminary 2022 Book Ban Data

In early September, ALA reported that eight months into 2022, the number of attempts to ban or restrict library resources in schools, universities and public libraries, was on track to exceed record counts from 2021. According to [preliminary data released in advance of Banned Books Week](#) (September 18-24), ALA reported that between January 1 and August 31, 2022, it documented 681 attempts to ban or restrict library resources, and 1,651 unique titles were targeted. In 2021, ALA reported 729 attempts to censor library resources, targeting 1,597 books, which represented the highest number of attempted book bans since ALA began compiling these lists more than 20 years ago.

Additionally, more than 70 percent of the 681 attempts to restrict library resources targeted multiple titles. In the past, the vast majority of challenges to library resources only sought to remove or restrict a single book.

"The unprecedented number of challenges we're seeing already this year reflects coordinated, national efforts to silence marginalized or historically underrepresented voices and deprive all of us –

young people, in particular – of the chance to explore a world beyond the confines of personal experience,” said ALA President Lessa Kanani‘opua Pelayo-Lozada.

Libraries nationwide highlighted increased censorship of books during this year’s Banned Books Week. Extensive programming during the week brought together authors, librarians, and scholars to share perspectives on censorship and resources to support library workers. ALA’s [Banned and Challenged Books website](#) provides free resources to help promote the freedom to read and to support those who are reporting and responding to challenges, bans, and concerns about library resources.

Applications Now Open for NEA Big Read Grants

Applications are now open for grants to support NEA Big Read projects between September 2023 and June 2024. An initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in partnership with Arts Midwest, the NEA Big Read supports community reading programs each designed around a single NEA Big Read book selection with the goal of inspiring meaningful conversations, artistic responses, and new discoveries and connections in each community. Matching grants range from \$5,000 to \$20,000 each. **The Intent to Apply deadline is Wednesday, January 18, 2023.** [Visit Arts Midwest’s website for complete grant guidelines and to apply.](#)

For their project, applicants will choose one of 15 books representing a diverse range of contemporary themes, voices, and perspectives. More information on the books and authors, as well as discussion questions and videos, are available on the [Arts Midwest site](#).

The NEA Big Read welcomes applications from a variety of eligible organizations, including first-time applicants; organizations serving communities of all sizes, including rural and urban areas; and organizations with small, medium or large operating budgets. Eligible applicants include, but are not limited to:

- Arts centers, arts councils, and arts organizations
- Colleges and universities
- Libraries and literary centers
- Community service organizations, environmental organizations, and faith-based organizations
- Museums and historical societies
- School districts and local education agencies
- Tribal governments and non-profits

Organizations also are encouraged to explore another open grant opportunity from the NEA and Arts Midwest—[Shakespeare in American Communities](#). Through grants to theater companies that produce Shakespeare’s works, this program supports high-quality productions and educational activities in middle schools, high schools, and juvenile justice facilities throughout the United States. **The Intent to Apply deadline is Monday, January 9, 2023.**

Libraries to the Rescue! Journal Article Advocates Libraries as Important Centers for Play

In recent decades, academic pressures have increased, parent anxieties and surveillance have grown, and legal constraints on free-roaming children have tightened, all leading to a well-documented decline in free play opportunities for today’s youth. As children have become more homebound and opportunities for play with friends outside of school have decreased, public libraries

have come to hold an increasingly important role as emerging centers for play, according to a recent article in the peer-reviewed [American Journal of Play](#).

The authors wrote, “Our goal in this research was to assess the potential for public libraries to help fill a recent gap in children’s educational opportunities in the United States, that gap being a dearth of places where children can play freely, socially, and safely without adult intervention.” While they conclude that libraries have taken great efforts to become centers of play and help address some of these larger issues, there’s still room to grow—particularly in offerings for older children and teens—and that the “primary barriers to play opportunities appears to be space, not money, staffing, or will.”

While the authors commend libraries for evolving to help meet the needs of kids, they implore all involved with libraries—government, associations, library systems—to go further to help in the fight to save free play.

The [full article](#) and [complete issue of the American Journal of Play](#) (Vol 14, no 2) can be read freely online.

First Nation Communities READ

An annual reading program by the First Nations public library community in Ontario, [First Nation Communities READ](#) (FNCR), announced its winning titles in the Children's and Young Adult/Adult Categories for 2022-23. Chosen by a jury of Indigenous librarians from across Ontario, these titles represent the best of Indigenous literature.

Selected Titles in the Children's Category:

We Dream Medicine Dreams by Lisa Boivin (Highwater Press). When a little girl dreams about a bear, her grandfather explains how we connect with the knowledge of our ancestors through dreams. Bear, Hawk, Caribou, and Wolf all have teachings to share to help us live a good life. But when Grampa gets sick and falls into a coma, the little girl must lean on his teachings as she learns to say goodbye.

Little Bear in Foster Care by S.P. Joseph Lyons (Indigenous Education Press). Lyons' book connects children to a range of emotions, encourages them to find their voice, and lets them know they are not alone or to blame. Through *Little Bear in Foster Care*, Lyons helps young children process their feelings and experiences. The richness of Indigenous cultures and emotions come alive in this story of healing and resilience.

The First Nation Communities READ program is the [Ontario First Nation Public Library Community's](#) contribution to the popular reading movement. Launched in 2003, FNCR encourages family literacy and intergenerational knowledge transmission. The program also promotes the publication, sharing, and understanding of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit voices and experiences. [Visit the FNCR site for a list of past winners.](#)

Free Resources on Bookmaking

Did you know that the Ezra Jack Keats Foundation offers [free tutorials on bookmaking](#)? Ranging from 7-14 minutes, these newly improved short videos, three on writing and three on illustrating, contain basic guidelines for helping kids create their own books. They cover topics such as story arc; pacing and paginating; material and method; planning a visual story; and more. This model program is easy to replicate anywhere, in a classroom or library, and could help foster a love of books even

with your reluctant readers. Visit the bookmaking page at <https://www.ezra-jack-keats.org/ejk-bookmaking-tutorials/>.

Do you have news of national interest to ALSC Matters readers--those working on behalf of youth in libraries, educators, and others interested in youth services in libraries? Please [use this form](#) to submit your news item (non-commercial) to be considered for inclusion in ALSC Matters.

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