REVERSING READICIDE

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It is with great sadness that the Knowledge Quest Editorial Board and AASL dedicate this issue to Elizabeth Ridgway, who passed away in December 2010 after she suffered a brain injury from a horse-riding accident. She was only 41 years old.

A member of the AASL community and the Knowledge Quest Editorial Board, Beth had a warm and vibrant personality that truly inspired people. Whether she was with her family, friends or colleagues, she always made a positive impression with her enthusiasm, kindness and her terrific smile.

Beth began her career in education as a middle school history teacher for the Arlington County public schools of Virginia. As an educator she came to understand the power of instructing students and motivating them to learn with primary sources – original historical and literary materials.

In 1998 Beth started working at the Library of Congress, where she eventually built and directed the national educational outreach program, Teaching with Primary Sources (TPS). As the Director of the Educational Outreach Division, Beth made profound and lasting contributions to students and educators throughout the country by providing professional development programs based on primary sources in the Library of Congress collections. She conducted primary source content development for the Library website; developed and led conference presentations; represented the Library to outside organizations and even wrote articles for education journals.

Beth’s love for her job and for teaching was clearly visible, as she was always full of boundless energy and optimism when it came to advocating primary sources in the classroom and the school library. She believed the resources to be conduits to history and humanities that unite educators with people and cultures throughout the world. When she wasn’t spreading the word at a conference, hosting a seminar, or writing a feature, you could find Beth helping a student learn more about history.

Those who knew Beth have often remarked about the connections she made with people, not only through her dedication to teaching, but through her humor, her luminous spirit and her generous heart. Elizabeth Ridgway made a difference in people’s lives. She is very much missed.

Beth’s family has established the ELIZABETH RIDGWAY EDUCATION FUND at the Library of Congress to help continue her work. You can make a donation at <www.loc.gov/philanthropy> in her name. You can also read and sign an online guestbook created for Beth at <www.caringbridge.org/visit/bridg/guestbook> or visit her memorial website at <www.realtimesw.com/Beth/beth.htm>.
“The absolute best way to get most kids reading is to give them books they’re going to love. Honest, it’s that simple.”

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Reversing Readicide

Nancy Everhart, 2010-11 AASL President

The Sunday school I went to as a child had some pretty strict rules regarding attendance. Each week the teacher would record in her book who was there, and if all members were present the class’s name would be posted for the week on a sign in the church hall. After three weeks of nonattendance, irregular participants like me would be dropped to the bottom of the book where we wouldn’t count and mess up the class’s chances of getting on the board. Once we came back we were moved to the regular list again. I have a vivid memory of returning one week after one of these absences. In her best Church Lady style, my teacher glared at me and sighed, “Now we’ll have to start all over,” as she erased my name from one category and put it in the other. I could swear Dana Carvey taught at my Sunday school!

That experience, which occurred when I was about nine, really impacted me. I didn’t want to go to Sunday school any more after that. Small events can have so much power over children. So it is with the theme of this Knowledge Quest issue: Readicide. I must admit I was unfamiliar with this term, but now that I know what it is—killing students’ love of reading—I can say that, unfortunately, I have witnessed it in school libraries many times as I’ve gone to observe student interns or conduct research. I’ve seen the following readicide scenarios:

- Students being shepherded to a few shelves to select books in their “range”
- Books being labeled and arranged by reading levels
- Students being told they could not take out the books they selected because their choices were not Accelerated Reader books or were too hard
- Students’ names being called out because they hadn’t brought back their books from the week before and couldn’t take out more books
- Students who didn’t bring their books back being made to sit at a special table—sometimes every week for months at a time—while their classmates browsed the shelves
- Overdue lists, which included students’ names and book titles, being posted in the library
- Libraries being decorated in such a feminine way that boys felt excluded (pink walls!)
- Libraries closed for days on end for AR testing

I’ve always maintained that reading motivation/management programs are not inherently evil. They are tools that can be used in multiple ways. The authors of the articles here provide a balanced view of personal experiences and research. I thank Dr. Ruth Cox Clark for guest-editing this themed issue and focusing on the positive aspects of encouraging reading!
**ALA Midwinter**
The ALA Midwinter Meeting was busy and interesting. I must say that San Diego is a wonderful place to hold a conference. The weather is comfortable, and the hotels are all very close to the convention center—although it is hard at times to go inside a meeting room and close the door when it’s right next to a large balcony overlooking the ocean! I was happy to see so many AASL members there, particularly in these hard economic times.

The economy is one of the catalysts that prompted the AASL Board of Directors to choose for its Mega-Issue discussion “How should AASL change its volunteer structure to maximize member value and more effectively conduct the association’s work?”

Out of that discussion came the Board’s decision to appoint a task force to study the role of directors-elect and another one to come up with a procedure to evaluate all committees. We need to work smarter, not harder or longer. The Board received an excellent comprehensive report from the Task Force on Diversity in the Organization, appointed by then-President Sara Kelly Johns in 2008. The Common Core Crosswalk Task Force has also done a tremendous job providing tables that help school librarians see how the AASL’s Standards for the 21st-Century Learner and the Common Core Standards align. To date that task force has completed “English Language Arts Crosswalk,” “Reading Standards in History,” “Reading Standards Literacy in Science/Technology,” and “Writing Standards,” and members are working on mathematics. Please check out their hard work at [www.ala.org/aasl/commoncorecrosswalk/index.cfm](http://www.ala.org/aasl/commoncorecrosswalk/index.cfm) before your state embarks on doing the same thing, as there is no sense in reinventing the wheel.

One of my favorite things to do at every ALA Conference and at every Midwinter Meeting is to attend Affiliate Assembly. I really enjoy hearing the delegates discuss the issues relevant in their regions. The Board gets invaluable feedback through affiliates’ Statements of Concern. This time I reported back that the Board voted to place a five-year archive of Affiliate Assembly commendations on the AASL website and also that by appointing the task force mentioned above we acted on a previous concern about the function of directors-elect. I also got to show some slides of the Vision Tour so far.

While in San Diego, I took advantage of the locale and scheduled a visit to the Vision Tour’s California stop: Bernardo Heights Middle School. School librarian Susan Sheldon planned a lovely celebration that was attended by school administrators and local government officials, along with other members of the school community. However, even Susan is dealing with dividing her time between two middle schools and having no budget. She is keeping things together with her aide, student volunteers (called TAs), and donations from the PTA and Rotary Club.

I was impressed by the many highly qualified candidates for AASL offices who presented at the Candidates’ Forum. Please remember to vote! And speaking of voting, AASL’s division councilor, Sylvia Norton, was voted onto the ALA Executive Board during Midwinter Meeting. This is quite an honor, and Sylvia will represent us all well in “Big ALA.” Congratulations, Sylvia!

**AASL President Nancy Everhart** is an associate professor at the Florida State University College of Information where she directs the school library media program, Project LEAD, and the PALM (Partnerships Advancing Library Media) Center. Visit [outstandingschoollibraries.org](http://www.outstandingschoollibraries.org) for information about her Vision Tour.
Given the chance, kids will read the same way adults do: for themselves. Don’t think of books for young people as tools; try instead to treat them as invitations into the reading life” (Sutton and Parravano 2010, xiv).

The above quote is from Roger Sutton’s introduction to A Family of Readers: The Book Lover’s Guide to Children’s and Young Adult Literature. I knew it would be savored, and perhaps quoted, over and over again when I saw on the book flap: "A Family of Readers is a book for readers, people who need books as much as food or air.” I not only understood the statement, I have felt it. I have held my breath in anticipation, ignored my stomach’s growling hours after I had settled in with a book, not getting up until I turned the last page. I admit it—I am addicted to feeding my reader’s soul. Doing so is as essential to my well-being as appeasing my physical hunger.

I have been an avid reader since the moment I got my hands—and teeth (or so my older brothers tell me)—on books. Books have been an integral part of my life, and the characters in them my friends, for as long as I can remember. When most little girls wanted to be ballerinas, I wanted to be a school librarian. So, when I was asked if I would be the guest editor for a Knowledge Quest issue that focuses on reading and how instructional practices in the P–12 school environment are killing the love of reading, I jumped at the chance. I hear the horror stories from my MLS students every semester as they attempt to entice children and teens to self-select books and read for pleasure when the very same students are burned out with reading due to school-mandated reading programs with stringent requirements placed on what and how they read. Due to these highly structured approaches, many of these same students are quite capable of reading at, or even above, their grade level. However, when not required to read for grades or points, they choose not to read, as they do not find any pleasure in reading. They rarely become recreational lifelong readers.

Unconscious Delight

Those of us who call ourselves lifelong readers have all spent time in the stage of literary appreciation that Margaret Early refers to as Unconscious Enjoyment. “The stage of enjoyment is the beginning of literary appreciation; it cannot be bypassed. Before readers are willing to work for a higher level of delight, they must be convinced that literature affords pleasure” (Early 1960, 164). I call this stage Unconscious Delight, for that is exactly what it is—delightful, delicious escapism reading we all love to return to no matter how “high-brow” our adult reading
As children we were given time and left alone to succumb to the unconscious delight of losing ourselves in a story. Our bodies may have been sprawled across old armchairs at our grandmothers’ houses or on sunporch swings at summer cottages, but vicariously we were swinging on vines through Sherwood Forest or joining Jessica and Liz as they rule the halls of Sweet Valley High. Taboo making the experience even more delightful, we were the ones vicariously brandishing swords beside our favorite characters or swooning over the newest heartthrob, more real to us than the student in the next seat over nodding off in boredom, as we happily journeyed beyond the classroom via a book or magazine hidden behind a textbook laboriously being read aloud by a classmate.

Factually Delightful

Remember the classmate, often a boy but sometimes a girl, whom you saw sitting on the floor lost in a nonfiction title or sometimes even in the reference section with a volume of the World Book Encyclopedia on his or her lap? You may even have been that student. Unconscious delight also happens with readers of nonfiction. It happens with the children who read everything in the library on a subject, like dinosaurs, and happily reaffirm their knowledge in book after book. They are experiencing the same kind of comfort zone many of us find in reading novels by a favorite author or in a favorite genre.

Teachers and school librarians of yesterday knew it was acceptable and quite normal for children and teens to delight in nonfiction books. And, yes, even read the pages out of order! Children love it when I tell them I read magazines from the back to front, and that I first read the pictures in informational books, then the captions, and (gasp!) sometimes that is all. Young readers do not seem to know it is acceptable to not read a book in its entirety, or to use the index to find the information desired and then close the book. However, they are very aware that if they don’t read every bit of text, they may not pass the multiple-choice test. That is, if the book has a quiz available. There are more reading program tests for fiction titles than nonfiction, and many of the highly illustrated nonfiction titles just waiting to help create unconscious delight in young readers sit gathering dust or are never purchased at all as selection is done based on test availability.

**Practice vs. Pleasure**

Students can quickly become bogged down and bored to the point of near unconsciousness with reading programs’ “endorsed” books that are at their reading level but of no personal interest to them, rather than happily self-selecting another book in a favorite series or by a favorite author. I know the argument—we are supposed to be encouraging youth to expand their reading horizons. We need to push them on to more “appropriate” reading. We fear they may stay stuck in the “unconscious-delight mud.” However, if budding lifelong readers are left alone to discover that reading is a pleasure, not a chore, they move on to other authors and other genres without our intervention. Early says it much better than I can: “The teacher, too, stands between the work of art [book] and the audience—and tries not to block the view! Indeed, his whole aim is to get out of the way as soon as possible….let them meet literature directly, prepared to be delighted” (Early 1960, 167).

Children left alone to select their pleasure reading, outside of the books/materials used in the instructional setting for honing reading strategies, learn the pleasure of reading. They realize the difference between what occurs in the classroom—learning to decipher text and gain meaning as well as fluency—is very different from their personal experience with self-selected books. No one is watching/listening as they skip a word and determine what it means by context, or even just plain skip it the first few times they see it until its meaning eventually becomes evident. No one knows that they are reading aloud in their heads during the difficult passages. They may not even realize when they have become so proficient that they aren’t slowed down by having to pronounce each word in their heads. This all happens as they happily explore books by favorite authors, topics of interest, or read all 20+ titles in a favorite series.
**Family Impact of Readicide**

The shift in reading instructional strategies to closely monitor reading selections, even those chosen outside of the school environment, has many parents involved, as well. Some jump on the “bandwagon,” and are vocal coaches and “book pushers,” wanting their children to be the highest point-earners in the class. Competition becomes the focus. Instead of overhearing parents, while I browse the shelves in libraries and bookstores, happily recommending books to each other that their children have read, or the parents have read aloud to them, I now hear interactions quite different in nature. Parents are looking at their watches and impatiently asking each other, the librarian, or sales clerk how they can find the books that have tests in their child’s school reading program. They may also be frustrated that the “allowed” books are not easy to find on the shelves. Why aren’t they clearly marked like they are in the school library? Where are the dots that save time? Time together in the library or bookstore with their children is no longer about parents enjoying the process of assisting and encouraging their children to self-select books. It certainly is not about allowing children time to browse and locate books that actually interest them. The focus is on quickly locating a book, no matter what the subject, with the right number of points and at the allowed reading level, so the child can get the required number of points to get an A that quarter/semester, or have his or her name on the top of the point-level chart.

By narrowly defining what is considered “allowable reading,” educators and parents basically have stymied the essential stage in literary appreciation—Unconscious Enjoyment—in a child’s journey toward becoming a lifelong, avid reader. Children are not being given the time to discover the unconscious delight found in reading every book in a series. They are not being given the freedom to discover what a participatory sport reading can be when vicariously developing a relationship with book characters. They are not being allowed to savor the joy of prolonged browsing in a library or bookstore to serendipitously find just the right books they didn’t know existed. In the zeal to create competent readers, we are, instead, creating alliterates—people who can read, but don’t.

**There is Always Hope**

Unconscious delight may not occur for all of us at an early age, but when the right book and the right time come together, the floodgates open. With the wealth of well-written and widely marketed youth titles, reading children’s or young adult titles no longer has any age boundaries. Due to the wide exposure of children’s

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*Children left alone to select their pleasure reading, outside of the books/materials used in the instructional setting for honing reading strategies, learn the pleasure of reading.*

Visit [www.ala.org/aasl/knowledgequest](http://www.ala.org/aasl/knowledgequest) to access exclusive bonus content for members, including: An article by Terri Kirk on how to actively encourage reading.
and young adult literature in the media, readers who
did not experience unconscious delight as a child
or a teen are still beginning their reading journey.

There is always hope—even for those who adamantly
declared they would never read another book after
they left a school with a mandated reading program
or a teacher’s classroom where every book read had
to be preapproved. The library, the bookstore, and
even the discount store shelves are brimming with
children’s and young adult books for readers of all
ages to wallow in unconscious-delight reading.

As reading advocates we are responsible to help open
the doors to unconscious-delight reading. We need
to remember what caused us to become avid readers
and share these experiences with anyone else who
will listen—and even with those who may just be in
the area. We are often unaware of who is listening
while we stand in line chatting or walking down
the street talking on a cell phone. Or, who may
serendipitously come across our Facebook pages or
blogs. Forget about being a parent, a teacher, or a
school librarian for just a moment—be a reader and
do what should come naturally—what some of us just
have to do—tell someone else about what you read!

In This Issue

Many publishing professionals, authors, librarians,
and educators are as adamantly about reading as I
am, and they all have perspectives and experiences
that need to be heard. The March/April 2011 issue
of Knowledge Quest is devoted to methods used to
courage P–12 students to become proficient as
well as lifelong readers. The term “readicide” is used
with permission from Kelly Gallagher, the author of
Readicide: How Schools are Killing Reading and What You Can
Do About It (Stenhouse 2009), who took time out of
his busy schedule to be interviewed for this issue.

Also interviewed for this issue was Malbert Smith III,
who discusses (with AASL President-Elect Carl A.
Harvey II) use of the Lexile framework for reading.

Dr. Ruth Small, director of the Syracuse University
LIS Program—School Media Specialization in the
School of Information Studies, joins with her
colleague Dr. Marilyn P. Arnone, codirector of the
Center for Digital Literacy, to share their expertise.
They both engage in research in the area of motivation
theories, so they are well versed in creative methods to
encourage reading. Dr. Ruth (as she is affectionately
known by her students) is also a frequent contributor
to the AASLForum electronic discussion list. The
AASL forum is open to all AASL members. You can
join online by visiting <www.ala.org/aasl/aaslforum>.

Kelly Milner Halls, author of high-interest nonfiction
titles including recently published Saving the Baghad
Zoo: A True Story of Hope and Heroes (HarperCollins 2010)
and the Junior Literary Guild selection Mysteries of
the Mummy Kids (Lerner 2007), knows what kids like,
based on her successful school visits, and in this issue
she shares her thoughts on enticing kids to read.

This issue would not be complete without voices
from the field. Several school librarians share their
techniques for counteracting readicide. One is Jill
Whitson, a proactive high school librarian, who
shares her techniques for making the library the
place teens want be. Whitson makes it clear how to
get teens into the library—give them what they want!

We also hear success stories about using school-
mandated reading programs to support the
curriculum, encourage reading success, and help
create lifelong readers. For example, professor,
program director and reading advocate Marie
Kelsey shares her passion for compelling students
to read by introducing them to nonfiction books.

I hope you all enjoy this issue of Knowledge Quest,
and that I—or one of the other avid reading
advocates who share their knowledge and
experiences—encourage you to take some time
to wallow in unconscious-delight reading and
then share the experience with someone else.

Ruth Cox Clark is an associate professor in the Department of
Library Science at East Carolina University in Greenville, North
Carolina. She teaches youth materials courses.

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Family of Readers: The Book Lover’s Guide to Children’s and
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Kelly Gallagher, a high school English teacher at Magnolia High School in Anaheim, California, has twenty-five years of experience in working with teens. He has written seven books, including Readicide: How Schools are Killing Reading and What You Can Do About It (Stenhouse 2009). Gallagher is an advocate for recreational and authentic reading in schools. He also employs an academic reading instructional strategy that combines close reading as well as pre-reading discussions to increase students’ understanding of complex texts, resulting in what he calls “the sweet spot” of instruction that gives students just the right amount of support to literature.

Gallagher has graciously allowed us to use his term “readicide” as the theme for this issue of Knowledge Quest. On November 17, 2010, he took time early in his busy teaching day to answer questions about his views on reading.

I thoroughly enjoyed my conversation with Kelly Gallagher and hung up smiling. How could I not? He said being a school librarian at the end of his career is one of his “fantasies.”

RUTH COX CLARK: The term readicide—“the practices educators employ to raise reading scores that actually kill students’ love of reading”—is based on your experience with teens. Is there any incident that comes to mind that helped bring this term to life?

Kelly Gallagher (kellygallagher@cox.net) teaches English at Magnolia High School in Anaheim, California, and is the author of Readicide (Stenhouse 2009).
**Kelly Gallagher:** A group of senior English students were reading editorials on the war in Iraq and while discussing what “the lifeblood of al Qaeda” means one of the students asked, “Who is this Al guy?” Our students are being taught how to read to pass tests and in the process they are not exposed to real-world, authentic reading materials such as editorials in newspapers, magazine articles, and blogs.

**RCC:** You state in Readicide that “interesting books are disappearing as funding is diverted to purchasing ‘magic pill’ reading programs.” What would be your “magic pill” to fix the problem of readicide in our schools?

**KG:** There is no magic pill. What works is bringing kids back to interesting books and an array of other reading materials. The kids who read the most do the best in school.

**RCC:** Readicide addresses the need for a “discussion director” in a school. What do you mean by this?

**KG:** The discussion director is someone on faculty, a teacher or the librarian, who advocates reading in the school by keeping the topic at the front of everyone’s mind, at faculty meetings addressing the need for recreational and authentic reading, and supporting reading-incentive activities in the school. I have led a book club in my school for the last eighteen years, and I have helped implement the twenty-minute campus-wide sustained silent reading time.

**RCC:** What types of activities occur in your classroom to encourage recreational reading?

**KG:** The students often present book shares or book commercials. They also create lists of books they would like to read later in the year. We have genre-based discussions, browsing through stacks of books separated by genres. The entire school also has a twenty-minute sustained silent reading time during the day.

**RCC:** What role does the school librarian play in creating a book flood zone?

**KG:** Show me a good librarian, and I’ll show you a good school. Librarians should be right in the middle of curriculum, visiting classrooms, and doing booktalks. They should be going to the teachers rather than waiting for the teachers to come to them. A good librarian is worth his/her weight in gold.

**RCC:** What one piece of advice would you give to a novice school librarian?

**KG:** The mission of the school librarian should be to make the library the most inviting building on campus. Make it welcoming and fill it with a wide variety of reading materials including books, magazines, comics, and electronic resources. It should be the place in the school that the students want to be.

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**There is no magic pill. What works is bringing kids back to interesting books and an array of other reading materials.**
CREATIVE READING

The Antidote to Readicide

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FEATURE
Reading is often thought of as a skill, something to be learned and practiced. But reading can also be considered a creative art, capturing the imagination of the reader in ways that result in creative thought and expression. Think of this as creative reading.

Reading as Both Skill and Art
Learning to read requires students to acquire a basic skill set that includes such things as recognizing sight words, decoding, vocabulary building exercises, finding the main idea, and summarizing. Classroom teachers and school librarians take major responsibility for teaching reading as a skill. Reading activities in the classroom are mainly comprised of textbook or basal reading, vocabulary drills, and comprehension tests. While teachers help students lay the foundation for reading competence, they lack the time and, often, the mandate to move students from skilled readers to creative, lifelong readers.

School librarians have a unique opportunity not only to support classroom-based reading skill building but also to serve as reading advocates and role models to foster students’ creative, lifelong reading habits. Through the school librarian’s enthusiasm for and joy of reading as a creative activity, students learn that reading is a pleasurable activity, one to cherish and continue throughout their lives.

Creative Reading in the Library
What does creative reading look like? Imagine a child who picks up a book on a topic of personal interest, finds a cozy place to read in the school library, and digs in. As she reads, she becomes more and more engrossed, picturing in her mind the characters as they act out the storyline, even imagining herself as the heroine, and never even hearing the end-of-day school bell.

How can school librarians create a library in which creative reading activities, like the example above, thrive? Fostering curiosity and imagination, providing a safe and friendly environment for pleasure reading, and assuring confidence and a sense of competence are all potential paths to this goal.

Fostering Curiosity and Imagination
"Mrs. O’Connell, do you have any books on skyscrapers? I want to know how they are built and how they manage to stay tall and straight—and who built the first skyscraper?" This is an example of an opportunity to transform a student’s curiosity about a topic into an ongoing reading interest.

Readicide is defined by Kelly Gallagher as “the systematic killing of the love of reading, often exacerbated by the inane, mind-numbing practices found in schools” (Gallagher 2009, 2).

Curiosity has been associated with a need for competence over one’s environment (Arnone and Reynolds 2009) that results in exploration to resolve the question or conflict that aroused the curiosity. Tapping into students’ natural curiosity is a powerful way to encourage reading for enjoyment.

To motivate and support their creative reading, students must have open access to a wide range and variety of reading materials both at school and at home.
A number of strategies can foster curiosity for learning (Arnone 2003), and many of those strategies can be tailored to reading. For example, create a “book hook” that arouses curiosity or stimulates a conceptual conflict. One school librarian starts with a box of books carefully selected for the age group and purpose. In quick succession, she picks up each book, shows the cover, and hooks the students with a question. She then offers one or two sentences about the book with just enough information about the characters or situation to pique curiosity. Not a book talk—just a book hook. She does this with several books on a theme and immediately twenty little hands of fourth-graders visiting the library wave frantically in the air. “I want to see that book!” “Can I look at that one next?” Stimulating reading curiosity and interest, while providing self-selecting reading experiences, helps nurture independent, motivated reading.

Creative reading experiences may be enhanced through technologies that expand the potential variety of reading formats and allow students to share their creative reading experiences with their classmates or with students across the world. For example, a sixth-grader creates a blog for her favorite storybook character—a teenage Apache girl living in the 1840s—assumes the role of that character, and responds to postings from students in a class of e-pals in Arizona, while a high school senior creates a video trailer about his favorite author’s books and presents it to his English class. Creating a sense of wonder and adventure in the library can help trigger students’ imaginations and “What do you suppose…?” questions. Such triggers can lead to exploration using a variety of reading resources to investigate possible answers to those questions. One middle school librarian turned her library into a creative reading destination by transforming the ordinary walls of her library into a jungle setting with a small, treehouse-like loft filled with large stuffed animals, creating a quiet, safe, and friendly place for students to read.

**Providing Access and Choice**

Acquiring skills requires practice. The more students read, the more competent and skilled readers they become. Furthermore, the more types of reading materials they have to choose from, the more likely they are to become not only more skilled but also more creative readers.

To motivate and support their creative reading, students must have open access to a wide range and variety of reading materials both at school and at home. School libraries can offer the full range of reading materials, from novels to graphic novels to comic books, from magazines to videos to blogs, and students can access them from the library, their classroom, or their home. Finding ways to provide access to reading materials at home not only increases the time and opportunity for students to practice and use their reading skills, but may also encourage parents to become more engaged in their children’s creative reading activities.

These creative activities will flourish in an environment that encourages selection autonomy, i.e., students can choose reading materials that are both interesting and meaningful to them. These materials can be too easy or too hard, too long or too short, and on topics that may or may not be relevant to the curriculum. If reading is a skill that must be practiced to achieve competency, then all reading materials are valuable regardless of format, length, or topic. Of course, the school librarian can seek to influence those choices through various reading selection guidance activities that pique curiosity and stimulate interest in reading.

**Assuring Confidence and Competence**

Helping students become competent readers while encouraging their disposition to read for enjoyment also contributes to both information and digital literacy skill proficiency (Reynolds, Arnone, and Marshall 2009). The link between these essential 21st-century literacies and reading demonstrates the important role the library plays in fostering creative reading.

Creative reading activities can provide enrichment opportunities for motivated readers, affording ways for them to read more or read higher-level materials about a topic of interest. For example, the student curious about skyscrapers who has already finished reading his first book on the topic may be a prime candidate to move from curiosity-based reading to a more enduring interest in reading about architecture and engineering.

Creative reading experiences, helping nurture curiosity for learning, and providing access to reading materials are valuable regardless of format, length, or topic. Of course, the school librarian can seek to influence those choices through various reading selection guidance activities that pique curiosity and stimulate interest in reading.

**While creative reading is often thought of as an individual activity, it can also thrive in non-judgmental, peer-supportive, group-learning environments.**
Some Examples of Creative Reading Group Activities

While creative reading is often thought of as an individual activity, it can also thrive in non-judgmental, peer-supportive group-learning environments. Here are some examples.

**Kids as Reading Partners.**
Pairing a struggling reader with a student who has attained reading competence to read together in some quiet corner of the library can be a win-win activity. The student who is competent can demonstrate proficiency, while the struggling reader can practice reading skills within a non-threatening learning environment.

**Reading through Writing.**
In one of our recent projects, older students (fifth- and sixth-graders) became subject-matter experts on environmental topics (e.g., endangered species). Using their imaginations, combined with their knowledge gained from reading, these students created original stories for first graders. Once their stories were “published” online (at <curiositycreek.org>), these student authors read their stories to their younger counterparts. The benefits were that the older students developed a sense of confidence and pride in their accomplishments and, in some cases, were motivated to read more, while the younger students were delighted by the stories and having “authors” (role models) read to them.

**Reading Relay.**
A group of both competent and struggling readers comes to the library to read a play. A certain subset is assigned the various parts in the play and begins to act out their roles while sitting around a table in the library. Those without parts stand around the perimeter, listening to the others read, knowing they may be selected at any moment to assume one of the roles. This continues until everyone has had a chance to be both a creative reader and a listener. When someone is stuck on a word or encounters other reading difficulties—no big deal. Another student just shouts it out and the process continues. This is a fast-paced, fun-filled creative reading activity in which everyone is equally valued for his or her participation.

**Reading as Its Own Reward**
Creative reading should ultimately lead to creative expressions of learning. Critical to the avoidance of readicide is encouraging the notion that the pleasure of reading in and of itself is its own reward—not stickers, unrelated incentives, or forced reading. This article has provided some suggestions for ways the library can promote students’ creative reading based on the intrinsic joy of the activity itself.

Critical to the avoidance of readicide is encouraging the notion that the pleasure of reading in and of itself is its own reward—not stickers, unrelated incentives, or forced reading.

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**Works Cited:**


Create a Game Plan for Your Library to Encourage Reading

Jill Bateman-Whitson
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“Good morning, Mrs. Whitson. Do you have any of those Tru books in yet?”

“Hey, Miss, where are those ‘whale books’?”

“Miss, do you have number 6 in the Bone series?”

“When will you have Mockingjay [the final book of The Hunger Games] back in?”

“Hey, yo, got any more Bluford books?”

“Mrs. Whitson, do you have a book by Thoreau for my AP class?”

These represent questions heard daily in the Greene Central High School (GCHS) library. But this was not always the case. Two years ago when I first became a school librarian, the students sounded reluctant to read or spend time in the library. They would drag in and tell me they hated reading, or how they had never found a book that they liked. The circulation was as low as the students’ opinion of the library itself. The situation was shocking! I could remember being reluctant to pry myself away from a good book in high school, and I couldn’t believe the number of students who were refusing to read anything in school. Yikes! What was a new school librarian to do? I know how important it is for students to be good readers. How could I encourage reading for the fun of it? I decided I needed a game plan.

**Make the Library THE Place to Be**

My first year was spent encouraging teachers and students to use the library’s services—to make it “the hub” of the school and a refuge for reading. I sent out a questionnaire during the teachers’ first workweek, promising chocolate @ your library to all who would fill out and return a survey about library uses. These survey responses enabled me to see that the teachers had not been using the library’s resources and that they were unsure how “accessible” the new librarian/library would be. I established an “open-door” policy: if the door is open then come on in! I let my colleagues know that the library was for the students and staff. Students needed to be able to come in during their busy days to grab books, work on projects, study, or do homework. For the teachers I created a REaD room with partitions made out of red office dividers. This room houses the professional books and journals; it has a comfy chair, a reading lamp, phone, and a table to spread out work. I also reached out to teachers with occasional helpful e-mail tips, collaboration ideas, and book suggestions. For the students I worked to collect the newest and best books that I could find. Most importantly, I made it a point to speak to everyone who walks in the door. It is so easy to make patrons feel welcome—and want to stay and read—just by giving them a cheery “Hello, how are you?” “Did you enjoy the book?” “Can I help you check out another one?”

While doing research for one of my last library science classes, I found that graphic novels were the newest...
trend. They were good for all types of readers and were incredibly fun to read. I collaborated with one of the English teachers, who is a graphic novel fan, to put together a collection of books. These included old favorites like Superman and Batman, as well as new faves like Bone, Sandman, and Plain Janes. I decorated an area with a huge Spider-Man stick-up and lots of graphic-novel posters. My student library assistants suggested using black paper to hide the shelves for the new graphic novels to increase the suspense before they arrived. On the "opening day" several English classes came in. The graphic novels were an instant success, especially with the Latino boys (figure 1 in page 17)! They loved them and still ask me to buy more.

Makeover: Library Edition

After observing and getting my newbie feet wet in year one, I had made mental notes of things that needed to be changed and set out on a multi-year library makeover. I reasoned that the old and stodgy nature of the forty-year-old space was not very appealing to today's 21st-century students. The shelves were crammed with ancient tomes, making finding the new titles difficult. I weeded out thousands of old titles. The task took a good part of the school year, but my student assistants and I thoroughly enjoyed the process. They found books to read that they normally would have missed, and I learned a lot about what was available in the library. Now we have lots of open spaces, plenty of room for new purchases, and the shelves are so much more inviting!

Next, it was time for a cozy reading area. By rearranging the existing sofa and club chairs around a coffee table, and adding a matching rug and a couple of lamps, I created an area that the students hustle to so they can get the best seats in the house (figures 2 and 3).

I encouraged students to come in during their lunchtime to read. I had my regulars every lunch period and as time passed, they started bringing friends with them. They said they like getting away from the crowds and noise of the cafeteria. They feel safe in the library and love to cuddle up with a good book for a few minutes. Our future plan includes a "lunch bunch" booktalk group where we will share with each other our latest reads.

Greene County has a large Latino population; I knew I needed to find books that they would enjoy reading. Like teenagers everywhere, they crave a good book, but because English is their second language some have trouble with the higher reading level of the young adult literature. Therefore, I brought in the "whale books," as one student calls them; the Orca Book Publishers collection of high-low books has been a wonderful addition for the ESL population. I ordered a large number of these books and put them in an area with the Spanish/English books, and then just stood back and watched them fly from the shelves. I recently checked...
some statistics through our online catalog system and found that out of
the ten students who check out the most books, eight are Latino! This is
due to the high-low books, graphic novels, and encouragement from
their English teachers who emphasize the importance of visiting the library. ESL students
are my “best customers.”

Another population that has had a big uptick in reading is the African
American group. On the circulation computer I keep an ongoing list
of “books to buy,” and students are always suggesting titles that they
would like to read. The Kimani Press TRU books and Townsend
Press Bluford series kept coming up time and again. So I bought a
couple of these books they will usually ask for recommendations
on other authors, and then these now-enthusiastic readers are off and
running toward what they used to run from—reading for the fun of it!

**Collaboration and Technology**

This year my goal is to encourage even more students to discover a
love of reading. I work hard to make everyone feel welcome. Several
teachers have started a “free-choice reading” time at the beginning of
their classes; the students in these classes are in the library every day,
getting a magazine or newspaper

They feel safe in the library and love to cuddle up with a good book for a few minutes.

Visit [www.ala.org/aasl/knowledgequest](http://www.ala.org/aasl/knowledgequest) to access exclusive bonus content for members, including: An article by Terri Kirk on how to actively encourage reading.
to read, or checking out a new book. Some stay in the library during the free-choice reading time because it is quieter and much more comfortable than many classrooms. The students love this freedom to read whatever they want and appreciate the freedom I give them to come in every day. As the semester progresses their library use has changed; in the beginning they checked out books just for the “free-choice” time, returning them at the end of class. Now they are reading whole books and then recommending them to their friends. Some books never get re-shelved; they circulate among the students in the class. Another way that I get kids interested in books is by labeling all of the award-winning and new books, and putting them on a shelf together. This is a great place to start for students who have no idea what book to choose. They can be assured that the books on this shelf are good stuff (figure 4).

Collaborating with teachers is another way I encourage reading. For the Social Studies Department I have created a book list that is full of historical fiction and nonfiction titles; Science Department lists have books about biology and other science themes. Every six weeks teachers in these departments assign their students one independent-reading book that goes with their curricula. This allows the students a

Figure 4. Easy-to-find good reads at GCHS.
chance to delve into a specific topic more deeply while getting valuable reading experience. I also invite teachers to bring their classes into the library to work, research, or check out books. The use of the library is very flexible, and students know that no matter what is going on in the library, it is their library; they are welcome to come in anytime and read or find the resources they need.

Our school is a “one-to-one” school, meaning a laptop is assigned to every student, so the students are very technologically savvy. I try to keep things new and exciting, and experiment with all the newest gadgets that we can afford. The literacy facilitator and I recently wrote a local grant to fund a “Kindle Kafé” for the library. Between the grant and some matching funds from the district we were able to buy four Kindle e-readers, and two café tables (with chairs) to create a café-type atmosphere. We plugged in a cinnamon-spice scent warmer, turned on some Mozart, and voilà!—a very cool, teen-friendly space was created. The students just love the new way to read and clamor for their turn to check out a Kindle.

This is my third year as a school librarian, and I must say that I think it is the best job in the school system! I realize that students need to “wallow in unconscious-delight reading” (as my children’s literature professor Dr. Ruth Cox Clark puts it) to reach the goal of being lifelong readers. I really love helping students find the perfect book or just watching as they discuss with each other their most recent reads. Just today a senior girl burst in the door, book in hand, puffing from jogging down the hall, and exclaiming, “This is the best book that I have ever read; thanks so much for recommending it!” Mission accomplished!

I know that test scores must improve and reading is a key component to getting the scores where they need to be. We librarians need to encourage students to read, read, read. We must make our libraries places of refuge for our students; they need to feel like the library is the most comfortable and welcoming place in the school—and it all starts with us!

The students love this freedom to read whatever they want and appreciate the freedom I give them to come in every day.

Jill Bateman-Whitson is the librarian at Greene Central High School in Snow Hill, North Carolina. She completed her MLS degree online from East Carolina University in July 2009.
Bridging the Divide Between Non-Readers and Lifelong Readers with Hi-Lo books

Carrie Gleason
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Some school librarians are optimistic and willing to try anything to get their kids to read.
I’m writing this article having just come from a library takeaway event, where wholesalers set up tables of books and hand-sell them to school librarians. As children’s books editor at James Lorimer & Company Ltd., a Canadian publisher that specializes in books characterized by a low vocabulary level and a high interest level for children and teens, these events are extremely valuable for getting feedback from school librarians.

In the past few years, there has been increasing demand from school librarians for books for “reluctant readers”—despite the impressive offering of children’s literature published each year and the success of blockbuster series like Harry Potter, Diary of a Wimpy Kid, Twilight, and Hunger Games, among others. This is also in addition to all the picture books, graphic novels, and other books that appeal to reluctant readers. Looking around at the vast array of new books each season, I sometimes find it hard to believe there is a crisis in reading.

At one time, publishers could assume that if a book made it past the school librarian and into the library, it would find its way into a reader’s hands. But today with increasing competition from portable technology (even within the library) and more books being published than ever before, we can no longer make that assumption. Our primary goal as children’s book publishers is to provide books that young people both can and will want to read.

Some school librarians are optimistic and willing to try anything to get their kids to read, like the school librarian who said, “I will try this book with my Chinese ELL students; they will identify with a book about the first Chinese pro football player.” Others come with very specific purchasing goals in mind, such as building their picture book or “books for boys” collections. Recently, one defeatist school librarian replied, “All these books have too many words. My kids won’t read this; they won’t read anything.”

Basically, non-readers can be broken into two broad groups: reluctant and struggling readers. The reluctant reader can read but...
chooses not to. The struggling reader, on the other hand, has difficulty with the mechanics of reading. In the last few years, the variety and number of books published for struggling readers has grown, especially in the form of hi-lo books in series. These books are characterized by a low vocabulary level and a high interest level. The “gap” between vocabulary, or reading, level and interest level can be significant, as in a book with a reading level of second grade and an interest level of age thirteen. But the gap can also be less, as in a book with a reading level of fifth grade and an interest level of age thirteen. Both of these have their place with struggling readers, depending on the readers’ skills.

A low reading level allows a struggling reader to successfully read and comprehend a story, giving him or her a sense of achievement and satisfaction once the book is completed. Depending on the reading/interest level gap, these books can have smaller page counts and fewer words on the page than other books, or they can be longer and look more like adult novels. The stories are often plot-driven and fast-paced—qualities that may also appeal to reluctant readers. A number of reading leveling systems are applied to these books so they can be used by literacy coaches as well as for recreational reading. Most publishers include the levels on the books, on their website, or in a teacher’s guide.

A number of publishers do hi-lo well at the lowest reading level. Capstone has several series of books with topics that range from sports to horror, mystery, sci-fi, and realistic fiction. Lerner and HIP Books (figure 1) also publish hi-lo material. Many of these books include illustrations and are designed to be easy to read. Once a struggling reader has achieved success with the easiest hi-lo books, he or she can move on to more challenging material.

Book reviewers and book buyers sometimes dismiss hi-lo material as lacking quality, but hi-lo books can be used beyond the most basic level of accessibility for struggling readers and appeal to reluctant readers. An example of a well-known book that has a low reading level but appeals to a variety of readers and non-readers is Star Girl (Scholastic Inc.) by Newbery-winner Jerry Spinelli. Some hi-lo series, like the Orca Currents series (Orca Book Publishers), have found their way into bookstores and are shelved alongside other children’s literature.

At first glance, hi-lo series can be mistaken as all the same. But
publishers know that reading can be a very personal experience, and there is huge variety in what appeals to each reader. They have developed series with as much variety as in children’s books in general. For example, both Orca Book Publishers and James Lorimer & Company Ltd. publish a hi-lo sports fiction series for ages ten and up. Orca Sports have a reading level between grades 2.0 and 4.5; Lorimer Sports Stories series are between 3.0 and 4.9. (Both are distributed in the United States through Orca.) The biggest difference between these two sports series is that Orca Sports books (figure 2) are mystery or adventure stories, with sports used as a hook to draw readers in. Lorimer Sports Stories (figure 3) have sports-driven plots that revolve around contemporary sports issues. Both series include books on a variety of sports, including popular sports like basketball, soccer, baseball, and hockey, as well as less-popular sports like lacrosse, rock climbing, kayaking, and skateboarding—two different series, both hi-lo, but created to appeal to struggling or reluctant readers with different tastes.

Based on the theory that teen boys are reading—just not novels—Lorimer also publishes a nonfiction, hi-lo sports series called Recordbooks (interest level 13 and up; reading level 3.0 to 5.5). These short sports biographies tell the story of “underdogs” who have changed the face of sport. The goal with this series was to take students who enjoy highly visual large-format, full-color sports books to the next level of reading by giving them narrative nonfiction that not only has a low reading level, but also includes sports stats, quotes, and photos in a convenient pocket-book size (figure 4). School librarians and teachers also like these books because they pass the 100-page rule for middle and high school.

Because struggling readers can be identified at any age, some students will not reach a level where they can read more difficult books until they are older, some even as high school students. An eleventh-grade student reading at a very low level may have success with Juvie written by Paul Kropp (figure 5) in the HIP Senior series (HIP Books). This book has a reading level of 2.8, is 96 pages long, and includes black and white illustrations. But lower isn’t necessarily always better for every struggling reader. Another eleventh-grade student who is also a struggling reader may have greater success with Final Takedown by Brent R. Sherrard (figure 6) in the SideStreets series (James Lorimer & Company Ltd.), a book that has
a reading level of 4.2 and is 128 pages long. The books in Lorimer’s SideStreets series (interest level 13 and up; reading level 3.0 to 5.5) are bridging books—they take a struggling reader beyond a low reading level and help make him or her a lifelong reader using an interior layout and page count that is similar to an adult mass-market book. A longer book can also allow more room for character development and sophisticated subplots, while the low reading level keeps the book accessible.

School librarians can now include in their collections a variety of hi-lo books that appeal to different interests, age ranges, and reading abilities. Recently Orca Book Publishers, in addition to its Orca Currents series (interest level 10 to 14; reading level 2.0 to 4.5) and Orca Soundings series (interest level 12 and up; reading level 2.0 to 4.5), took hi-lo one step further and released the Rapid Reads series: hi-lo books for adults based on the idea that quick reads will compete with other quick fixes for entertainment (figure 7). By checking the website of publishers of hi-lo series books, school librarians can now choose books that will allow struggling readers of any age and ability to gradually narrow the gap between their reading levels and their interest levels.

Carrie Gleason is a young adult and children’s books editor at James Lorimer & Company Ltd., a Canadian publisher of books for reluctant readers. She is also the author of Environmental Activist (Crabtree 2009), Ocean Storm Alert! (Crabtree 2004), and many other nonfiction books for children.
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Wednesday, October 26, 2011
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PRESIDENTS: Laura Pearle, Buffy Hamilton, Wendy Stephens, Frances Harris & Angela Carstensen

Engaged Learning Through Curriculum Aligned Games (Elementary)
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PRESIDENT: Brian Mayer & Christopher Harris

Top 25 Websites for Teaching & Learning: Categories, Criteria, and Collaborative Strategies (BYOL)*
Wednesday, October 26, 2011
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PRESIDENTS: AASL’s Best Websites for Teaching and Learning Task Force

Law for School Librarians: Protecting Students Intellectual Freedom in the Digital Age
Wednesday, October 26, 2011
1:00pm – 4:30pm
PRESIDENTS: Helen Adams, Barbara Striping, Dorcas Hand, Deborah Caldwell-Stone, & Theresa Chmara

“Turning the Page” on School Library Media Education
Wednesday, October 26, 2011
1:00 pm – 4:30 pm
PRESIDENTS: Judi Repman & Gail Dickinson

Power Searching: Demystifying Popular Search Engines and Getting Quality Research from Everyday Tools (BYOL)*
Thursday, October 27, 2011
8:30am – 12:00pm
PRESIDENTS: Natasha Bergson-Michelson

Engaged Learning Through Curriculum Aligned Games (Secondary)
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Rise to the Challenge: Creating a High-Stakes graduation project program to Demonstrate excellence in information literacy and independent learning
Thursday, October 27, 2011
8:30am – 12:00pm
PRESIDENTS: Michelle Fossum & Linda Savido

Making a Big Impact @ Your School Board Meeting: How to Get Your Message Out to Your School Community
Thursday, October 27, 2011
8:30am – 12:00pm
PRESIDENTS: Margaux DeGuidice, Rose Luna & Sara Kelly Johns

Taking Wikis to the next level: Create attractive & functional Wikis to Support Student learning (BYOL)*
Thursday, October 27, 2011
8:30am – 12:00pm
PRESIDENT: Lisa Perez

ELMSS Research Symposium
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8:30am – 12:00pm
PRESIDENTS: Audrey Church, Gail Dickinson, Jody Howard & Shana Pribesh

*BYOL = Bring Your Own Laptop

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Pat Mora
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Joan Bauer
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After marriage, a career change, and an automobile accident, Joan Bauer decided to fulfill her love of comedy by writing Squashed, while recuperating from the accident. She has written nine novels for teenagers, including Hope Was Here, which won a Newbery Honor.

AUTHOR BRUNCHES
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Gennifer Choldenko
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Her novel Al Capone Does My Shirts received a Newbery Honor Medal and appeared on the 2005 lists of NYPL’s 100 Titles for Reading and Sharing, NYPL Best Book for the Teen Age, ALA Best Books for Young Adults, and ALA Notable Books.

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**2. DEMOGRAPHICS** We need information about the nature of our attendees. Please answer the questions below.

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2. How long have you been a member of AASL?

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- 11–15 years
- 16–20 years
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- More than 25

3. How many of the fifteen National Conferences (including this one) have you attended?

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- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14
- 15

4. Including this year, how many years have you been a school library professional?

- 0–5 years
- 6–10 years
- 11–15 years
- 16–20 years
- 21–25 years
- More than 25
- Not a school librarian

5. How would you categorize your school community?

- Rural
- Urban
- Suburban

6. How many miles will you travel one way to attend this conference?

- Less than 25 miles
- 25–50 miles
- 51–100 miles
- 101–250 miles
- 251–500 miles
- 501–1000 miles
- Greater than 1000 miles

7. In what product categories do you have purchasing authority?

- Books
- Database services
- Library Supplies
- Automated Systems
- Non-Print Material
- Computer Hardware/Software
- Other:

8. What is the annual acquisition budget under your authority?

- Under $5,000
- $5,001–$10,000
- $10,001–$20,000
- $20,001–$50,000
- Over $50,000

**3. CONFERENCE REGISTRATION** Join AASL now and register at the member rate. Forms are available online at www.ala.org/aasl/membership.

Please circle the appropriate fee below

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Early Bird</th>
<th>Advance</th>
<th>Late/On-Site</th>
<th>One-Day:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>by Aug. 4</td>
<td>by Sept. 29</td>
<td>after Sept. 30</td>
<td>Circle Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual AASL Member</td>
<td>$240</td>
<td>$290</td>
<td>$340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual AASL Member plus Administrator*</td>
<td>$340</td>
<td>$390</td>
<td>$440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual ALA Member</td>
<td>$340</td>
<td>$340</td>
<td>$390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Member</td>
<td>$405</td>
<td>$465</td>
<td>$505</td>
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<tr>
<td>Retired AASL Member</td>
<td>$165</td>
<td>$215</td>
<td>$265</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student AASL Member</td>
<td>$105</td>
<td>$155</td>
<td>$205</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exhibits Only</td>
<td>$25</td>
<td>$25</td>
<td>$25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group – AASL Members Only (per person.)**</td>
<td>$215</td>
<td>$265</td>
<td>$315</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please complete the following:

**ADMINISTRATOR’S NAME:**

**ADMINISTRATOR’S EMAIL:**

**GROUP DISCOUNT** is for five or more AASL individual members from the same school district. You must submit all forms together to qualify for the group rate.

This offer is not available online.
4. CONFERENCE ADD-ONS Check the AASL website for the latest descriptions of Preconference Workshops & Symposia.

PRECONFERENCE WORKSHOPS & SYMPOSIUM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workshops &amp; Symposia</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Administrator</th>
<th>Member</th>
<th>Non-member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Aboard! Evaluate, Plan, and Report to Build Library Support</td>
<td>WED. OCT 26</td>
<td>8:30 AM–4:30 PM</td>
<td>$189</td>
<td>$239</td>
<td>$304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books, E-ink and Databases, Oh my! Collection Development in the 21st Century (BYOL*)</td>
<td>WED. OCT 26</td>
<td>8:30 AM–4:30 PM</td>
<td>$189</td>
<td>$239</td>
<td>$304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged Learning Through Curriculum Aligned Games (Elementary)</td>
<td>WED. OCT 26</td>
<td>8:30 AM–12:00 PM</td>
<td>$109</td>
<td>$159</td>
<td>$224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top 25 Websites for Teaching &amp; Learning: Categories, Criteria, and Collaborative Strategies (BYOL*)</td>
<td>WED. OCT 26</td>
<td>1:00 PM–4:30 PM</td>
<td>$109</td>
<td>$159</td>
<td>$224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law for School Librarians: Protecting Students Intellectual Freedom in the Digital Age</td>
<td>THUR. OCT 27</td>
<td>8:30 AM–12:00 PM</td>
<td>$109</td>
<td>$159</td>
<td>$224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power Searching: Demystifying Popular Search Engines and Getting Quality Research from Everyday Tools (BYOL*)</td>
<td>THUR. OCT 27</td>
<td>8:30 AM–12:00 PM</td>
<td>$109</td>
<td>$159</td>
<td>$224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged Learning Through Curriculum Aligned Games (Secondary)</td>
<td>THUR. OCT 27</td>
<td>8:30 AM–12:00 PM</td>
<td>$109</td>
<td>$159</td>
<td>$224</td>
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<tr>
<td>Turning the Page on School Library Education</td>
<td>THUR. OCT 27</td>
<td>8:30 AM–12:00 PM</td>
<td>$109</td>
<td>$159</td>
<td>$224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rise to the Challenge: Creating a High-Stakes Graduation Project Program to Demonstrate Excellence in Information Literacy and Independent Learning</td>
<td>THUR. OCT 27</td>
<td>8:30 AM–12:00 PM</td>
<td>$109</td>
<td>$159</td>
<td>$224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making a Big Impact @ Your School Board Meeting: How to Get Your Message Out to Your School Community</td>
<td>THUR. OCT 27</td>
<td>8:30 AM–12:00 PM</td>
<td>$109</td>
<td>$159</td>
<td>$224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking Wikis to the Next Level: Create Attractive &amp; Functional Wikis to Support Student learning (BYOL*)</td>
<td>THUR. OCT 27</td>
<td>8:30 AM–12:00 PM</td>
<td>$75</td>
<td>$125</td>
<td>$190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELmSS Symposium</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>$75 $125 $190</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

5. HOTEL RESERVATIONS

Arrival Date: __________________________

Departure Date: _________________________

**Please indicate the order of hotel preference (1–4). Rooms are assigned on a first-come, first-served basis based on your arrival and departure dates. Most hotels in Minnesota are non-smoking hotels. See the AASL website for complete details on all hotels.**

1. __________________________
2. __________________________
3. __________________________
4. __________________________

Should priority be given to rate or location? □ Rate □ Location

**If sharing a room, the above person will be the point of contact. Please don’t send more than one copy of the housing form.**

ROOM TYPE (check all that apply):

□ One King Bed □ Two Full or Queen Beds □ Smoking □ Non-smoking □ ADA Room (indicate needs):

ROOMMATE SHARING Indicate the number of people staying in the room: __________________________

Roommate #1: __________________________

Roommate #2: __________________________

Roommate #3: __________________________

6. FEES AND PAYMENT

**SUMMARY OF FEES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conference Registration (step 3):</th>
<th>$___________</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conference Add-ons (step 4):</td>
<td>$___________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preconference Workshops</td>
<td>$___________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Tours</td>
<td>$___________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Tours</td>
<td>$___________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author &amp; Networking Events</td>
<td>$___________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guest Tickets</td>
<td>$___________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TOTAL DUE $___________

**PAYMENT/GUARANTEE**

□ Check/Money Order

□ Visa

□ Mastercard

□ Purchase Order

□ Am Express

ACCOUNT NUMBER ____________

EXPIRATION NUMBER ____________

SIGNATURE ____________

A credit card valid until December 2011 is required for all hotel reservations regardless of registration payment by PO or check.
For more information and to register, visit the AASL Website at www.ala.org/aasl/aaslannual.

Disaster Preparedness for School Librarians
Friday, June 24, 2011 | 1:30pm – 5:00pm

Beyond Words™
the Dollar General school library relief fund

Join Terry Young and Nancy Teger as they lead a discussion on disaster preparedness. Gain valuable insight to disaster planning as these experts share their experiences, successes and lessons learned. Learn the ups and downs of disaster recovery as they apply to the school librarian and the library. Discover the subtle differences of planning and recovery as they apply to public and private schools. Use the knowledge and experience of this panel to devise a plan in the event of a disaster.

Speakers: Terry Young, School Librarian, West Jefferson High School; Nancy L. Teger, Sc.D., Library Media Services Program Specialist, Florida Department of Education

Tickets: This workshop is provided by the Dollar General Beyond Words Grant. Due to limited capacity, registration is required.

Top 25 Websites for Teaching and Learning:
Categories, Criteria, and Collaborative Strategies
Friday, June 24, 2011 | 8:30am – 4:30pm

Take an in-depth look at AASL's 2010 Top 25 Websites for Teaching and Learning. During this fast-paced, hands-on, collaborative workshop you'll learn which Websites best support the Standards for the 21st-Century Learner, inquiry learning and the curriculum. You'll be actively involved as we Skype, tweet, survey, organize, create, click, video and have fun learning about these Web 2.0 tools. Bring your laptops and you will leave energized with resources to implement these exciting tools in your school. You might even get a sneak peek at the 2011 winners!

Speakers: Best Websites for Teaching and Learning Committee

Tickets: AASL members $179; ALA members $229; Non-members $269; Retired AASL members $179; Student AASL members $179.
Compel Students to Read with Compelling Nonfiction

Teachers are charged with the unachievable: cover a seemingly infinite number of standards in a finite amount of time.

To cover everything, they often must race through mandated chunks of content knowledge, making it impossible for students to savor and reflect on any new ideas that might motivate them to read personally interesting materials outside of class. This is a lost opportunity for students to engage in authentic reading and learning on their own terms (Gallagher 2009). Speed and overwhelming comprehensiveness are the perfect breeding ground for readicide (Gallagher 2009), but it does not have to be that way. The current abundance of high-quality nonfiction offers

Children will be processing information for the rest of their lives, so it is essential that their minds be engaged with nonfiction at an early age.
compelling reading that may ignite student interest in the midst of the drive for all-inclusiveness. This compelling nonfiction has the potential to reverse student indifference to academic content, and enhance students’ willingness to read because well-written nonfiction turns distant times, distant places, and the abstract into real and compelling drama. First-person narrative, descriptive passages, and figurative language transform historical events, people’s lives, and scientific facts into stories that are often stranger than fiction. Today’s nonfiction authors are masters at hanging facts on a conceptual framework in a way that produces a memorable true story that both informs and entertains (Cobb 2006).

Nonfiction: Past and Present

Nonfiction was once very similar to textbooks. It usually offered straightforward informative text with muted, unimaginative illustrations. Like textbooks, nonfiction was designed to be comprehensive, but not necessarily very interesting. Students will not learn from books they can barely stand to read, and they will not internalize something they encounter only once (Ivey 2010). Students lose on two counts: their interest in reading is negatively affected and their test scores may suffer.

Today, lively and colorful reality-based reading for children and young adults is about as far removed from the old nonfiction model as the computer is from the pencil. School librarians must provide and promote these materials as crucial components of the lifelong success of the students—because they are. Children will be processing information for the rest of their lives, so it is essential that their minds be engaged with nonfiction at an early age. They need to learn how to effectively read it and even enjoy it. With today’s innovative nonfiction, these are not unrealistic goals because nonfiction is as entertaining as any story. Children are naturally curious, a state of mind that is well suited to the current information-rich society. The trick is to deliver information in a way kids will enjoy and absorb. In current nonfiction the informational vitamins are hidden on the page in plain sight. They’ll go down easily, and the reader will both enjoy and learn at the same time.

Trends in Nonfiction

The earliest identified work of children’s nonfiction is the 1657 work Orbis Pictus (The World Explained in Pictures), a unique attempt in its day to engage children in illustrated nonfiction. Figure 1 shows pages replete with woodcuts accompanied by text generously framed in white space. This format was as revolutionary as the Dorling Kindersley Eyewitness books that arrived on the contemporary scene in 1988. DK, as it is popularly known, rejected the square picture technique and developed the striking look of cutout shapes on white backgrounds (figure 2). The intent was to focus the reader on the details and the information that goes with it. With the cut-out shapes, words fit closely to the picture, making the words and pictures blend on the page and focus the reader’s attention. Photography as illustration became the new wood-cut in the DK books.

Science as entertainment has been developed to a high art form by Vicki Cobb who has been “making facts memorable” since 1972 when she published Science Experiments You Can Eat. This former science teacher delivers content and experiments that are just plain fun, while teaching solid concepts at the same time. Kid-friendly topics such as junk food, sneakers, fireworks, and show business are part of her Where’s the Science Here? series.

Another way information is conveyed in a child-friendly way is through informational storybooks, which use a storyline to enliven factual material. An Extraordinary Life: the Story of a Monarch Butterfly by Laurence Pringle serves as a stellar example as it conveys the migratory journey of a monarch butterfly without using excessive anthropomorphism. Taking the storyline to the level of fantasy, the Magic School Bus series draws children into wonderful adventures as they learn about science from archaeology and the Arctic, to waterworks and whales, along with the students on the bus (Vardell 2008).

Graphic nonfiction has also been proven as a vehicle to interest young readers. The two Maus volumes by Art Spiegelman drive home the horrific holocaust in a highly personal way. Persepolis by Marjane Satrapi is a powerful autobiography of a nine-year-old Iranian girl at the time of the Shah’s overthrow. For American crime, including the assassinations of both Lincoln and Garfield, no one is better than Rick Geary at delivering intricate history with authentic (often-times grisly) details in Edward–Gorey-inspired cartoon panels (”Rick Geary” 2008).

These are just a few examples of the wide-ranging variety in today’s nonfiction techniques and formats. Once you begin to explore these systematically you can build an attractive and diverse collection of nonfiction with compelling reading to attract nearly everyone.
Promoting Nonfiction

To promote nonfiction, it is important to know what the teachers are teaching and when. The school librarian should be actively involved in curriculum development, serving on related committees, and proactively seeking out teachers to discover what units they teach and when. If the school already has a curriculum map in place, much of the work has been done. If not, the school librarian should begin to build a map for each content area and grade level. Create a table with each month of the school year in a separate column intersecting with at least three rows, one for content, one for skills, and one for resources in the school library (Howard 2010). This mapping will position the school librarians well to promote nonfiction at the very time a particular unit is being covered. This mapping also offers the opportunity to evaluate the collection and purchase new nonfiction to pep things up.

To access a wealth of information about good nonfiction, register at INK (Interesting Nonfiction for Kids) Think Tank: Nonfiction Authors in Your Classroom <www.inkthinktank.com>; this website and database of nonfiction connected to curriculum standards can guide you as you build your collection of nonfiction resources. This site is colorful and credible, listing some of the best in nonfiction, as well as providing links to teaching resources and opportunities to connect with authors through a wiki or with others via a blog. Use INK Think Tank for selection and involve the teachers by helping them sign up for their own accounts. You can also sign up for an alert service to help you select nonfiction. The Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County has a kids’ nonfiction RSS feed <www.cincinnatilibrary.org/spotlight/newarrivals.asp?id=kids_nonfiction>, for example, that can be used as a source for identifying new nonfiction you might want to add to your collection.

When promoting nonfiction it is also important to encourage teachers to demonstrate approval of nonfiction books as worthy reading. Present teachers with nonfiction for reading aloud to their classes. They do not have to read the entire book if there is not enough time. Selections and snippets will work. Teachers should express enthusiasm for their own hobbies and interests by reading aloud about them.

Well-written nonfiction turns distant times, distant places, and the abstract into real and compelling drama.
Attract reluctant readers with books of facts and lists; compelling accounts of disasters, strange lives, and events of the past; and things grownups find yucky.

Personal connections like this may ignite student enthusiasm, as well. Teachers must spark the students’ inner “need to know,” a natural curiosity about the world around them. Buried in Ice by Owen Beattie sparked this curiosity in a sixth-grade boy who spotted a picture of a dead man in the book, prompting him to reflect, “I wondered by why he didn’t decay and what the big hump was” (Moss and Hendershot 2002, 12). School librarians should booktalk nonfiction to classes in the school library and have many nonfiction titles on display.

Another way to highlight nonfiction is to put lists for the content units in your own library’s account through LibraryThing <www.LibraryThing.com>, which allows you to assign tags representing units of study, state standards, courses, teachers, and format. This does not mean the titles should not appear in your catalog as well, but LibraryThing has value-added features: the colorful dust jackets that appear with each title and the non-subject-heading tags you can assign, customizing access for your users. Teachers could project the LibraryThing collection for the current unit on a screen in the classroom and introduce the students to the related books. Student choice is critical to getting students to read (Moss and Hendershot 2002), and LibraryThing would show students they have choices about reading material related to their latest unit of study.

Pairing nonfiction with fiction in school library displays is also a good way to promote content integration with enjoyable reading. One example would be pairing the counting concept...
nonfiction book Missing Mittens by Stuart J. Murphy (figure 3) with the Ukrainian folktale retold by Jan Brett in The Mitten (figure 4).

To get started with pairing, try Eduscapes’s resources on pairing fiction reading with nonfiction <http://eduscapes.com/sessions/thinkers/index.htm>.

A Remedy for Reluctant Readers

Although the death of reading may be endemic to many K–12 educational environments, the traditional reluctant readers are still an identifiable subgroup that needs special attention. They are typically drawn to nonfiction more often than fiction. Action, informative minutia, the taboo, and the weird are usually main interests (Dayton–Sakari and Jobe 2003). Attract reluctant readers with books of facts and lists; compelling accounts of disasters, strange lives, and events of the past; and things grownups find yucky. It’s Disgusting and We Ate It by James Solheim and Oh, Yuck! The Encyclopedia of Everything Nasty by Joy Masoff (figure 5) are two books designed to nauseate you but fascinate kids.

ESL Students

Students who speak English as a second language (ESL) can also benefit from nonfiction that concretely presents vocabulary and concepts. A photo essay, a compilation of photos illustrating most of the concepts and points in the book, offers an exceptional way to give meaning to text for these students, helping them develop their literacy skills. Any nonfiction book with many captioned illustrations will benefit ESL students. Some major authors who use photos as their vehicle for understanding include Russell Freedman, Nic Bishop, and Sandra Markle.

Current Awareness

To keep up with the latest and best in reality–based reading that will counteract readicide, school librarians should be aware of two yearly awards presented to outstanding nonfiction for children and young adults. The Orbis Pictus Award for Outstanding Nonfiction for Children is given by the National Council of Teachers of English, and the Robert F. Sibert Informational Book Medal is bestowed by the Association for Library Service to Children (a division of ALA).

School librarians can be a huge influence in remedi ing readicide if they provide lively nonfiction that will engage students’ curious minds and serve as a learning tool complementary to their textbooks. Like fiction, nonfiction can tell a story, but its reality base and immediacy make it more compelling than an imaginary tale. A real-life frozen human who actually walked the earth at one time is an attractive concept to a student whose own real–life experiences extend little past the local neighborhood. Reading nonfiction is a chance to experience something real and highly unusual from the safety of home. If teachers partner with school librarians and encourage diverse nonfiction reading, academic content achievement ought to improve. At the very least, through lively and engaging nonfiction students may find more enjoyment in reading and make it a habit that will serve them well throughout their lives.

Works Cited:


Marie Kelsey is professor and program director of the Educational Media and Technology program at the College of St. Scholastica in Duluth, Minnesota. Her most recent publication is “Are We ‘Lucky’ for the First Amendment? A Brief History of Students’ Right to Read,” which appeared in the November/December 2007 issue of Knowledge Quest.
The mission of a school library is to provide a safe and open environment that encourages a child to explore personal interests.
A first-grade boy holds a book on volcanoes in his hands. It is not a book for which the school has an Accelerated Reader test, a requirement of checkout for that day. (The class will come another day for “free choice.”) His teacher quizzes the child in front of his peers: “If you want that book, show me you can read it. Now.”

The boy’s excitement over the images of exploding volcanoes dissolved into mud under that kind of pressure. Not surprisingly, the book was returned to the shelf.

A teacher’s directive overheard during book selection: “You may not want to check out nonfiction books. Nonfiction is hard to test on in AR.”

The above examples illustrate the negative results of AR applications in the school library because implementation is often unique to individual teachers, even within schools.

What Is Accelerated Reader and What Are Its Origins?

Accelerated Reader, often referred to as AR, is a popular leveled reading program produced by Renaissance Learning, Inc. under their motto “Advanced Technology for Data-Driven Schools.” The website <www.RenLearn.com> contains a host of tools for promoting and using AR in the classroom and in the school library. A primary feature is a database of thousands of quizzes for students to take once they have read a book that is included in the database. These books are rated by Book Level (BL) based on an ATOS readability formula developed and used by RenLearn. ATOS (Advantage/TASA’ Open Standard) ranks books based on their relative difficulty. For example, a book may be rated at a 3.2, or a third-grade-plus level. It is this reading level that is referred to as its BL by RenLearn. RenLearn also incorporates Interest Levels into book selections. The comprehension quizzes generally contain five to twenty multiple-choice comprehension questions. Students may move forward in increments to the next level of reading based on their successful completion of these quizzes. Literacy skills, vocabulary, and recorded voice quizzes are also available (Renaissance Learning 2010).

The history of Accelerated Reader began over twenty years ago in Wisconsin when cofounders Judi and Terry Paul developed a system of tracking student progress as well as determining a book’s ATOS Book Level. Since the late 1980s AR, through Renaissance Learning, Inc. (“RenLearn”), has been implemented by thousands of school districts in an attempt to determine the level of students’ reading comprehension and to track how reading scores improve.

What Does AR Look Like in the School Library?

The school library personnel are most often responsible for determining a means for indicating that a book has an AR test available. The spines of the books for which there are tests are typically labeled with a highly visible symbol to indicate a quiz is available. The BL number may also be noted on the spine so a student can determine at a glance that the book is within the allowed BL. The books may also be labeled on the inside cover with the BL and additional AR information.

Upon entering the library it is visually evident, by the additional spine labels, how
much of the collection has AR quizzes. Generally the fiction section is heavily labeled and the nonfiction section less so. A typical AR elementary library may have as much as 90 percent of the fiction marked as AR books and perhaps the reverse in nonfiction.

How Are Students Affected by AR in the School Library?

Although a school may be an “AR school,” the level of focus on the students’ BL and how many quizzes they are expected to pass may vary. Some teachers may go so far as to restrict students to checking out only books with AR quizzes, as well as requiring them to clear the specific titles with them. Others may allow students to self-select their books, requiring them to pass enough quizzes to accrue a specific level of points assigned to each title by AR.

Traditional unrestricted browsing behaviors are profoundly changed when AR selections are mandated by teachers. The inherent nature of reading-level labeling systems in the public school library can create conflicts: between school librarians, library staff, and teachers; and between students and their desired choices in library browsing and selection.

The issue of AR applications and selection policies in the library is often polarizing, and professional staff who oppose its use are often afraid to speak out.

When the Book Level number on the library book spine is an obvious marker, students not only focus on that number as they browse, they often shun other books that do not fit their BL criteria. Self-selection by noting intriguing titles, favorite authors and genres, or visually appealing cover art often comes to a halt as students simply look for the AR spine labels.

Teachers’ directives can interfere with student browsing. The behavior modification that takes place is often a direct result of the teachers’ requiring, for example, “two AR books and one ‘fun’ book” at checkout. Teachers can often be heard calling to students to look for their tested AR BL range, say 2.5 to 2.8.

The school library personnel are most often responsible for determining a means for indicating that a book has an AR test available.

FIGURE 1. SHELF OF FICTION BOOKS SHOWING MOST WITH...
In a not uncommon situation I have overheard, several primary-age children are told the books they choose must be near their AR-tested reading levels. The teacher steps to the shelves and begins to make suggestions. I hear no titles. Instead a reading-level-focused bidding takes place: “1.5? No, that’s too easy for you. Get a 1.9 book. A 2.2 is too hard for you. Choose a book with a lower number.” It is difficult to witness what is intended to be an environment that encourages interest-based browsing and self-selection of materials become a teacher-controlled, reading-level-structured, restrictive extension of the classroom.

**Points and Goals**

AR also offers a specific number of points for each title as students complete the quizzes. Points are assigned by RenLearn based on the number of words in a book and the book’s readability level. In addition to the AR symbol and the BL numbers on the spine, the book usually has a label on the inside cover listing the number of points a student can “earn” by reading the book and passing the AR quiz.

For example, Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* is assigned only 14 points in the AR system despite its Book Level of 11.7, while a longer book such as *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* with a BL of 6.8 is worth 32 points because the popular fantasy title is much longer than a classic such as *The Scarlet Letter*. Good readers are often seen reading a lengthy book for the number of points they can earn, rather than one selected due to personal interests.

The use of points and point goals creates a number of variables, depending on how the points are applied. Teachers frequently have parties for those students who have reached their AR individual or classroom goals. As some teachers go to extremes to see that point goals are fulfilled, many students, especially struggling readers, are thus left out of the cupcake-receiving line or the movie treat.

Many teachers require classroom point-attainment goals for the month or quarter; others give their students a choice on whether to read for points or to complete a written assignment. In many cases students can choose a point goal they will reach for that period. Point goal attainment is often used as part of reading grades. Is this a problem?

I believe there is a troubling aspect in the use of point goals for assessing a child’s reading success. If point goals for class rewards or point goals for grades are a factor in a child’s choice of books, this is counter to the mission of a public school library to provide a safe and open environment that encourages a child to explore personal interests. To watch an avid young reader who has had books read to her from birth begin to shun books she would have enjoyed previously should be greatly disturbing to educators and parents. This young person, an obviously bright and thoughtful child, has perhaps learned that numbers are now the measure of success, and that she must play the game to achieve a grade. Thus, for this child the act of internally motivated reading may have been reduced to a function of schoolwork and measured success. The joy of turning to the next page has been replaced by an arbitrary and external “reward” and/or requirement. “Elaborate commercial programs (think Accelerated Reader or Book It!) may be the most efficient way to teach kids that reading isn’t pleasurable in its own right…” (Kohn 2010).

But Wait, There’s More:
The Zone of Proximal Development

ZPD—the Zone of Proximal Development—is a term RenLearn uses to offer students a comfort zone of readability and is often applied by teachers as part of the AR program.
The majority of children in a school using AR are enthused about sharing their favorite titles with teachers and with each other.

The term ZPD, as used by RenLearn, refers to a reading level assessment range that supposedly keeps students from being bored by books that are too easy and from being frustrated by books that are considered by the teacher to be too challenging for that student. “In an effort to provide an essence of ‘science’ in their brochures AR has inappropriately adopted the term ZPD, and has misunderstood and misrepresented the concept [Lev] Vygotsky originated” (Serafini 2004).

During library browsing situations the teacher’s ZPD requirement very often causes children to stand frowning in front of a shelf of library books.

“Can I help you find a book?” the school librarian asks.

“I want that book.” The child points to a book about stock cars.

“Then take it. Check it out,” the librarian offers.

“I can’t,” says the child. “It’s below my AR reading level, and I have to get an AR book.”

The teacher appears. “You can check it out as one of your fun books,” she offers. The child turns away from the shelf. “I left my fun book at home.”

“Well, then, you do have to get your two AR books today. We want you to improve your reading, don’t we?” asks the teacher.

Legal and Ethical Issues Raised

Are students’ civil rights violated by requiring a number of AR books, with titles without tests considered off-limits, except as a “fun” book? Even public libraries usually stipulate checkout limits for one person not carting home fifty books. But does anyone expect the public librarian to restrict patron access to certain titles?

Teachers sometimes assign topical or genre-specific books, such as biographies, while students are in the library. How is this different from assigning AR books each week? I believe it is different because reading is a skill to be taught in the classroom and an intrinsically motivated joy to be explored in the freedom of the library environment, whether the source of that joy is a picture book a fifth-grader remembers with love or a book of giant snakes that a first-grader cannot read but will hug to his chest on his way to the checkout desk.

Labeling of library books can also result in other subtle complications. The ALA states, “While lists from programs like Accelerated Reader may be helpful in selecting books for a school or public library…it is important to remember that emotional and maturity levels do not necessarily correlate with reading level” (ALA 2010). If children select books for their point value and BL, they may be reading books that are possibly above their maturity level, as well as missing out on many excellent age-appropriate titles. I have often heard a youngster tell me he is bored with his book, but feels he must finish it for the AR test and points he hopes to earn.

Students’ rights to privacy may be compromised when their classmates observe them choosing books by Book Level, or if teachers are directing their students to certain BL requirements (ALA 1986). “Library media specialists have the responsibility, both legally and ethically, to protect the privacy and confidentiality of their patrons, no matter their ages” (Adams 2007).

Even RenLearn has posted a document that reads, “Libraries for older students often place the labels inside the front or back covers to allow greater privacy for developing readers” (Renaissance Learning 2010).

The breadth and depth of the library collection is negatively affected if a school librarian is using the availability of a reading program test as an inclusion criterion. When researching circulation histories of titles, allowing for cover appeal and interest potential, school librarians may find that non–AR books sit for years gathering dust while their shelf-neighbors move frequently. RenLearn’s website documentation defines books that are not suitable for “quizzability,” including most how-to books, poetry, and graphic-rich, text-box factual books (Renaissance Learning 2009).

A Search for Solutions

If you do not have a leveled reading program already installed in your library, and such programs are on the horizon, research the professional literature and ALA position statements and share
your findings with administrators. Define your school library’s mission(s) and solicit support from your colleagues in other districts. Research and cite your school district’s board policies on censorship and privacy issues. A school board policy manual may contain wording that specifically prevents children’s test or assessment data from being shared with parties other than the child’s teacher, the parents, and the child. In discussions with administrators, relate these position statements and policies to your own job description. Request time at staff meetings to share your concerns about the many ways AR is used in your district and offer to develop a consistent policy.

If leveled reading labels are already in place in your library, educate parents and get them involved. This strategy may be resisted by many teachers and administrators, but speak out when you can within the guidelines of your job description and board policies.

Consider your available strategies in carrying out your job requirements and obligations. We serve the entire school population, not just those teachers who want AR labels in the library. As part of your job description and district policies, you may find justification for removing AR spine labels in your collection. “A library doesn’t have to succumb to labeling just because the school district uses AR. I suggest you remove all of the labels” (Scales 2010, 16).

**Conclusion**

Because of the many aspects of AR or other leveled reading programs, and the varied styles and personalities of teachers, there are myriad ways that AR labeling and selection mandates can be used wisely, misused, or even abused.

“There is still no clear data supporting the test and prize aspects of Accelerated Reader….Schools, in other words, are spending the equivalent of one-third of their book budget on software that has not produced any concrete evidence that it helps children” (Krashen 2007).

When teachers tell you the school library’s primary mission is to support them in their curricula, you might ask, “Which teachers and which curricula?” "Is AR or AR labeling of library books mandated in this district?"

Whether or not AR point goals pertain at checkout, children are enthused about sharing their favorite titles with teachers and with each other. Teachers are also very involved with their students’ reading choices, often helping with checkout. My concerns, however, have to do with the issues of library collection accessibility in an equitable and consistent way for all children, and the labeling of library books for a reading program.

As school librarians our mission is to serve all teachers and especially all children, and to promote a love of reading and joy in their library experiences. Keep AR labels and programs in the classroom and out of the library.

**Works Cited:**


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Elyse Cregar has twenty-five years of experience as a public school librarian in Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and Idaho. She is currently the district elementary librarian in the Moscow (ID) Public Schools.
In its training seminars, Renaissance Learning stresses that AR is to be used as a teaching tool for guided reading practice (Renaissance Learning 2007, 6). It is never to be used punitively.

Accelerated Reader’s impact on student reading achievement has been debated in educational circles for some time. The effectiveness of this tool to motivate students and build reading comprehension depends on its usage and the training provided to teachers using it.

Seven years ago I was working as a K–12 school librarian in a small, rural Arkansas school in the Bright Star School district, as I had done for approximately eighteen years. Several years prior, our district
had purchased Accelerated Reader (AR) from Renaissance Learning, a program that provides daily information about student reading and makes it easy to continuously monitor comprehension, track the time students spend reading, and differentiate reading practice. As sometimes happens in public schools, funds were available for purchase of the program, but not for teacher training in its implementation. After struggling along with trying to make it an effective tool and listening to educators from other schools who were using it with success, I decided to ask that the classroom teachers and I be sent to the company’s training on how to use the product effectively. Because of the cost, the superintendent agreed to send only me, with the understanding that I would provide professional development for the classroom teachers when I returned. He also allowed me to purchase training manuals and videos for use in sharing with the other teachers.

Upon completion of the training, I was convinced that I now had the tools necessary to make implementation a success. I returned full of enthusiasm and ready to share what I had learned. Most importantly, for me, I was determined to use the program in my library classes and was able to persuade the administration to purchase the STAR companion assessment program.

Student Acceleration
In its training seminars, Renaissance Learning stresses that AR is to be used as a teaching tool for guided reading practice (Renaissance Learning 2007, 6). It is never to be used punitively. Renaissance Learning recommends grades not be given for reading practice and suggests that any Accelerated Reader Quiz grades 85 percent or above should be recorded as 100 percent, and all grades below 85 percent should be prorated accordingly. All teachers involved should agree on the grading formula (Renaissance Learning 2007, 22). Grades are to be used only to raise a student’s average or as bonus points. Accelerated Reader Quizzes should never lower a grade. In my practice, I chose to record any test score of 80 percent or above as 100 percent, and 60 percent as 80 percent. Quizzes scored below 60 percent were not recorded.

Each student starts out by taking the STAR test, a companion program to AR, to determine his or her instructional reading level. The student is then guided to choose books on this level as a starting point for success. Each time a student passes a quiz with 85 percent or higher score, the student’s book level is raised or the length of book is increased within his or her Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Renaissance Learning 2007, 7–21). Again, I chose to use 80 percent success as the guide for increasing the level or length of books read.

The first year I tried this out, I had one female elementary student raise her reading level two grade levels in one year. Her mother stopped me one day and asked, “You’ve really been working with Amy, haven’t you?”

Her mother had noticed the improvement in her daughter’s reading. This same mother was even more excited when she saw her younger son, who was really struggling with his reading, start to achieve success through AR.

Building a Love for Reading with AR
The real test of the program came a year later when Billy moved into the district. I met Billy the first week of school when he came with his class to the library. Cocky and disruptive, he presented quite a challenge. After skills instruction, STAR testing, and book selection, the class lined up to leave, and I noticed that Billy did not have a book in his hand. When I asked him where his book was, he leaned back in his chair, crossed one ankle over the other knee, tilted his head back, and replied with just a hint of a sneer, “You don’t understand. I don’t read.”

1 Students’ real names have not been used in this article.
I smiled and quietly, but firmly replied, "You don’t understand. It’s not an option."

I sent the others back with instructions to tell the classroom teacher that I was keeping Billy for a little while and that he would return to class later.

After the door had closed behind the last student, I led Billy to the computer and had him retake his STAR test while I watched. Then I examined his score. It was his second year in the third grade, and he was reading on a kindergarten level. We went to the shelves, and I helped him select a book on his level. He read it to me and took an AR quiz. He passed it with 60 percent, but he was just amazed that he had passed it. We selected another book for him, and this time he passed with 80 percent. He was awed that he had scored that high.

At that point, Billy and I made a deal. I kept a "treasure box" of small inexpensive trinkets (e.g., erasers, bracelets, plastic animals, balls, toy coins) in the bottom drawer of my desk. I had purchased these at a local party-supply store. Each time Billy passed an AR test he could stay behind after class and choose a "reward." Every time he followed my class rules and allowed me to teach uninterrupted, he could also choose a prize. This was our "contract." We shook hands on the deal. True to his word, in the weeks that followed, if he misbehaved, he would look at me knowingly as he walked out the door without asking. If he stuck to our deal, he got his prize. Most importantly, each time he passed an AR quiz with 80 percent or better, not only did he receive his reward, we also boosted the level of the next book he read one-tenth of a grade level. Renaissance Learning advises against raising the bar only this much at a time, but Billy needed the immediate positive reinforcement of this approach to ensure success.

Billy very quickly advanced to first-grade level. By the time he was reading on second-grade level, he was running into the library three to four times daily to read and test. His confidence level was up; he was enthusiastic about reading; and he actually did not need the extrinsic reward any longer, though I did continue it to keep my end of the bargain. At this point, I was able to allow him to broaden his reading choices as long as they fell within his ZPD. If he did not pass with 80 percent or better, he dropped his book level back down a tenth of a point or so, or tried another book at the same level before progressing.

His teacher was concerned that he was coming to the library too much, but I encouraged her to allow him to come as much as possible whenever he asked. He did come in occasionally when I had other classes, but he was never really a problem. Just before spring break, six months into the school year, he was reading on third-grade level.

When he started reading books on third-grade level, he was ecstatic. We exchanged high-fives; he jumped up in the air; and he cheered for his own accomplishment. I celebrated along with him. The school yearbook that year even featured a photograph of him reading a book.

When school resumed after spring break, Billy did not return. I found out that he had been living with his grandmother and that over spring break he had gone to visit his mother. Billy’s grandmother told the school secretary that when his mother called to say that she was keeping him with her, the grandmother could hear him crying "No!" in the background. I was heartbroken and very concerned for him. I knew how hard he had worked to achieve the progress he had made, and I did not want him to get discouraged. In the years following, every school year he has come to mind, and I have hoped that he continued in his love for reading.

**Using AR Effectively**

My path in education has changed also. The district in which I was working was annexed into the neighboring Fouke Public Schools district. My job assignment has changed over the last few years. I am now a high school librarian where I have found that a student’s choice of reading material, coupled with time spent reading, factor into motivation and comprehension as much as or more than the level of materials read.

I still firmly believe that for elementary students, building a foundation of ever-increasing levels of comprehension is essential for success. I also firmly believe AR should never be used in a negative or punitive way. It took a great deal of sharing and training to encourage one of the upper elementary teachers with whom I worked after I got AR training to convince her to allow her students to read on their own individual levels. However, once she tried it, she saw the gains her students made. I have seen students as young as second-grade denied credit for reading a fourth-grade-level chapter book because the student scored only 75 percent on the quiz. Such measures serve only to discourage student initiative. Grades should be prorated. In my usage, 80 percent equaled 100 percent. 75 percent equaled 95 percent, and 60 percent equaled 80 percent when recording grades. No grade below 60 was recorded, and only those 80 or above were averaged together. The classroom teachers and I agreed that they would record
the pro-rated average of all AR quizzes taken during the grading period as a bonus grade to be averaged in with classroom reading grades. Accelerated reading results were used only to boost grades.

Every time I discuss with a classroom teacher the seeming misuse of AR, I receive the same information—the teacher had not been through the Renaissance Learning training on the implementation of the product. In such cases, neither the teachers nor the students can be blamed for the Accelerated Reading program not working. In fairness, neither can administrators whose ability to authorize training is limited by available funding. The ineffectiveness of AR cannot be blamed on the program itself, but rather on the absence of training in its usage.

As supported by research, AR is an effective tool for strengthening reading comprehension and motivating students. Carol Ann Howard, for her 1999 doctoral dissertation at Old Dominion University, conducted a study of recreational reading in grades three through five in a southeastern Virginia school district. She concluded as part of her findings, “…recreational reading, using AR, increases reading vocabulary, comprehension, and attitude, providing it is utilized as intended” (Howard 1999). A 1999 report from the Education Commission of the States, Denver, Colorado, quoted a study at the University of Dundee (reported by S. R. Volland, K. J. Topping, and H. M. Evans): “…results indicated that even when less than fully implemented, the Accelerated Reading program yielded statistically significant gains in reading achievement…” (1999, 4). For her Master’s thesis at Salem–Teikyo University in Salem, West Virginia, Nancy E. Facemire conducted a study of the effects of the Accelerated Reader program on economically disadvantaged students in an area of West Virginia. The study focused on the reading comprehension scores of a group of third-graders. She reported that, according to a 1997 Institute for Academic Excellence report “Toward a Balanced Approach to Reading Motivation,” extrinsic motivation was not an integral part of AR. The findings of her study showed that students using AR showed greater gains in reading comprehension than those not using Accelerated Reader (Facemire 2000).

Does AR motivate students to read? Does it help to build their reading comprehension? Used as intended by teachers trained in the AR program’s proper implementation, it is a valuable and motivational tool for instruction in reading. Used appropriately, extrinsic motivation gives way to intrinsic. I have seen first-hand how AR can make a profound difference in the life of one child.

Kathryn Solley is library media specialist and School Improvement Plan chairperson at Fouke (AR) High School. She is also a member of Arkansas Association of Instructional Media and Arkansas Association of School Librarians. She has been married to her husband Joe (also a teacher) for fifteen years, and they have two children—Kaitlyn, age fourteen; and Kevin, age nine. Both children have participated in the AR program with success.

Works Cited:


This report is a descriptive analysis of the Accelerated Reader program. It provides evidence of effectiveness based on implementation.


This master’s thesis details a study of the effectiveness of the Accelerated Reader program on increasing reading comprehension scores in third–graders in an economically disadvantaged area of West Virginia. Her report stressed the importance of motivation and implementation, and concludes that the program is successful.


This doctoral dissertation focused on the use of Accelerated Reader in improving recreational reading in third-, fourth-, and fifth-graders in southeastern Virginia. Findings indicated that implementation of Accelerated Reader did improve comprehension and vocabulary development, and that success depended on intended utilization.


This publication is Renaissance Learning’s instruction manual for proper implementation of Accelerated Reader in the classroom. It stresses that the purpose of Accelerated Reader is to guide students’ progression in reading comprehension on individual levels and to foster intrinsic motivation.
PROMOTING THE JOY OF READING WITHOUT

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Under North Carolina state law (as well as common law), a public library card may be considered a contract. Youth under the age of majority (a minor) cannot legally contract, so parents or guardians control access to public library services for their children. Even if the minor signs a contract it is not legally enforceable. The age of majority for contracts varies by state but in most states is considered to be either eighteen or no more than twenty-one, unless the youth is considered emancipated, which is a legal process that establishes independent status. If a public library provides a library card to a minor, someone has to be responsible for damaged or lost books. As a result, parents may be allowed to see what their children check out or their history of library usage. Not all parental requests for records are odious, but may stem from the simple need to locate the child’s borrowed books that need to be returned.

Even if a parent is controlling and wants to know what his or her child is reading, that request is well within the law. However, with the advent of the Patriot Act, many libraries have adopted the practice of wiping out circulation records as soon as materials (borrowed by users of any age) are returned. This restrictiveness on the part of parents, guardians, or even librarians could be critical for adolescents who through books explore their feelings and the world around and beyond them; within books adolescents can see beyond their own current experiences. And if the parent does not have transportation or chooses not to use the public library, a child won’t be exposed to the wonderful resources there. Parental control and lack of access to public libraries can inhibit what or whether a child reads.

If a parent or guardian wishes to see the record of what his or her child has checked out, the child has no legal protection under privacy rights. A public library could adopt the stance of requiring a subpoena for all records requests, which is what many have done.
with the advent of the Patriot Act. Requiring a subpoena to see a minor’s circulation records would, at best, be a stall tactic since parental rights and not the rights of an underage child would control. In contrast, requiring a subpoena for the adult patron records protects the library as well as the patron under privacy laws.

All of this is a legal framework, whereas the ethical framework found in the ALA’s Freedom to Read Statement <http://tinyurl.com/3q78hc>, though important, does not necessarily have the force of law. The ALA’s Freedom to Read Statement is considered a code of best practices and could be viewed as a standard by which public libraries should operate. Children who go to a public library experience the best of this ethical framework at work with librarians who do not censor how much or what minors check out. Nor do librarians who demonstrate these best practices found in the Freedom to Read Statement restrict what is purchased and on the shelves, available for everyone to check out.

Best Interests
How do these frameworks apply to school libraries? Schools and teachers act to a limited degree in loco parentis, thus assuming the role of parents, especially in the health and safety of minors in attendance at public school, but also in setting educational standards. Public schools have been delegated this role and implement policies, programs, and procedures that sometimes, unintentionally, do not support the freedom to read or to make free choices regarding reading, and may contribute to students becoming non-readers. All of these actions are done in the name of building readers who will be able to recall, retell, and comprehend, and, in the end, pass the mandated tests. Nowhere in this process is the joy of reading the overarching theme, although this joy is always a hoped-for byproduct.

Though school librarians are part of the solution, they are sometimes part of the problem. How? By limiting the number of books a student may check out based upon the need to “teach responsibility,” or by requiring that a student may get only a book he or she can read, or by stipulating that a student may not “abandon” a book once starting it, school librarians and other adults continue to thwart learners’ natural desire for self-direction and personal choice. For proof, one only has to see how providing self-checkout and removing limits on numbers or types of books increases circulation and empowers students. Students begin to see the school library as a positive place for them.

Get as many books into their hands as they can be responsible for and carry.
This line of thinking leads to further discussion about whether students actually read the books. Who knows whether they read or do not read the books? However, it is clear they will not read what they do not have access to, either in their hands or in their book bags! If proof of reading is needed, school librarians and teachers can devise appropriate strategies, from follow-up discussions to computer-driven programs.

But is monitoring pleasure reading any way to excite a child about reading? An ideal way to encourage reading is to hold informal book-review sessions conducted by students with their peers, sharing their favorite books or most recently read favorite books. Such active sharing generates more excitement and enthusiasm for reading than any reading program or book report could do—especially when coupled with seeing the real book or a projected image from the school’s online catalog. This active sharing not only empowers, it appeals to multiple learning styles, and increases students’ ability to speak and articulate the reasons they like specific books. Another more individual way is for the teacher or school librarian to ask the student one-to-one whether or not he or she liked the book and why. In classrooms this may be called conferencing, while in the school library this is just the standard way of doing business as school librarians seek to put the “just-right” book in the hands of the student.

If rules requiring a student to complete a book and not abandon it, or to read a specific genre are needed, please let such requirements come from the teachers and be based upon specific assignments. Let the school librarian foster the freedom to choose as well as the freedom to abandon a book that proves boring or too hard.

Also, in support of the freedom to read, the school librarian may foster an atmosphere where censorship is seen as inappropriate. Students can be taught that they may return (without finishing) books containing content they (or their parents) find offensive. However, in keeping with the freedom to read, other students and their parents may find the very same material appropriate.

Let students check out the number of books they believe they can be responsible for, and then see how they do. And let them borrow materials via self-checkout! This empowers a student, and frees the school librarian and other staff to teach or assist more students seeking guidance by asking, “Can you help me find a really good book?”

Being stewards of our school resources doesn’t mean books should remain on the shelf in pristine condition, but instead means resources should be placed in the hands of students to explore. Mine is not a recommendation to work at odds with the classroom teachers, but a plea for understanding of the different roles played by school librarians versus classroom teachers. While it is true school librarians teach and support the curriculum by collaborating and cooperating with teachers, school librarians also are on the front line, fostering students’ love of reading.

Sometimes the two goals appear to be in conflict. However, conflict can easily be avoided by being clear with students: When a teacher says something is required, it is. In contrast, when a school librarian works with students selecting pleasure reading, the standards are different. Because there are so many books and so little time, students should have “permission” to abandon a book picked up for pleasure reading. Sometimes a student should be encouraged to read at least ten pages (or maybe a chapter) to be sure the book is “not working” for him or her. But if the book doesn’t grab the reader’s attention during this “try out,” suggest trying another book.

If students, on their own, learn in elementary school to explore the richness of their school libraries, they will usually continue to read for pleasure in middle school where reading has continued to drop off. This abandonment of reading self-selected books is often in response to study of the novel in the classroom, but is just as often in response to what happened to students in elementary school—where what they could or could not read was prescribed in a lockstep manner. They might have been told they could check out only books with specific reading levels or could borrow just one or two books at a time.
As a result of this regimentation, students may never develop a joy of reading for pleasure or the fun of exploring many genres. But when students are allowed to explore, they will know what they like and how to find it, even when they move on to a new school. In other words, through self-direction and exploration young readers will become empowered. This empowerment is borne out anecdotally by an eighth-grade language arts teacher in the local school district. The teacher reported language arts teachers in this middle school no longer require a classroom novel study. They allow students to read what they wish. Parents are reporting to this teacher a sight they have not often seen before: Their children are reading—all the time, at home, and in the car!

**Turning reading into a sport usually diminishes the innate, private joy of reading for pleasure.**

**Take the Competitiveness Out of Reading Programs**

Many reading programs that schools pay to implement, with the idea that the programs promote reading by rewarding students who pass tests and earn points, actually (in this author’s opinion) don’t promote much more than instant recall of facts. There usually is no clear measurement of comprehension, just memorization. Having such programs tends to drive collection development, as well. If students must take the tests, per their teachers’ assignments or parents’ requirements that students participate and “earn points,” then young learners will read only books for which tests are available. Really excellent books without tests will languish on the shelf—or might not be purchased—because the test has become the only reason to read a specific book.

Further, such programs impose a competitive spirit on students and their families, thus making a “sport” of reading, a tactic that can work well for some but just as often backfires for independently spirited students. In the end, students subjected to competitive reading programs often stop reading just as soon as they are no longer required to read. Turning reading into a sport usually diminishes the innate, private joy of reading for pleasure.

**Summing It up for Schools**

While it is true reading must be taught and reading leveled books helps students be more successful, the lockstep approach requiring that students have access only to books they can read results in their viewing reading as just another chore. To promote and/or preserve the innate, personal joy of reading, children should have the freedom of access all day to a wide variety of books. They ought to be able to self-select, self-check out, and then have in their possession the tangible expression of beautiful words and/or pictures they can read on their own or with adults. And, once in possession of library books, they should be allowed to decide on their own whether to look at the pictures and read. The temporary possession of a self-selected book is part of the pleasure found in the freedom to read.

Get into their hands as many books as students can be responsible for and carry. Get out of their way as students explore on their own and be a positive part of the experiences they wish to share!

**Sonja Beckham**

is currently the school librarian at Sanford Creek Year-Round Elementary School in Rolesville, North Carolina. She returned to the field in 2000 after a career in law and in higher education. She earned National Board Certification in 2004 and has presented on copyright for educators at the North Carolina School Library Media Association conference.
How to create strategic stories to gain support for your library

The single-most-important skill for librarians is the ability to share the library’s story in a compelling way so people want to help you succeed. This workshop helps you significantly improve your ability to “tell your story” and win support from parents, government officials, administrators, and other stakeholders. Appropriate for all types of libraries and information services, this interactive workshop includes an overview of techniques, how to tell your library’s story using the “Three-Act Storytelling Method”, tips, tricks and techniques.

Nancy Dowd is the Director of Marketing for the New Jersey State Library where she incorporates her career experiences as an editor, writer, presenter and marketer to produce effective and replicable marketing strategies for libraries. She is the author of ALA’s best-selling book, Bite-Sized Marketing, Realistic Solution for Overworked Librarians and The M Word blog.

A popular speaker, Nancy has spoken around the world helping libraries improve their marketing and advocacy efforts. Her statewide marketing campaign, Tell Us Your Story, was one of six campaigns awarded the 2010 John Cotton Dana Award.

Session One: March 15 | 6:00 pm EST
Experience how strategic stories can help you gain the support you need. Learn the three easy steps that will guarantee your story hits the mark with your listeners.

Session Two: March 22 | 6:00 pm EST
Messaging is everything. What kind of messages resonate with parents, teachers or administrators? This session will review participants’ messages and answer questions to ensure the story you share will matter to your listener.

Session Three: March 29 | 6:00 pm EST
This session will help participants put their stories together. We will review submitted stories and tweak them to perfection!

Archived sessions will be available on the AASL website at www.ala.org/aasl/createyourownstory.

Writing Contests for Teens
AASL and Figment.com celebrate School Library Month by presenting four writing contests for teens. In honor of this year’s theme Create Your Own Story, Figment invites students 13 and up to participate in story writing contests to be judged by some of the YA literature’s most exciting authors- Alyson Noel, Lauren Oliver, Paolo Bacigalupi, and Gayle Forman. Prizes will be awarded weekly, and one grand prize winner will be awarded a Kindle. For more information, visit www.ala.org/aasl/slm.

Storytelling Podcasts
Hear stories from your peers on how they successfully worked with different stakeholder groups.

Week of April 4: Principals
Week of April 11: Parents
Week of April 18: Teachers
Week of April 25: Legislators

For more information on School Library Month events and resources to help you Create Your Own Story this April, visit www.ala.org/aasl/slm.
AN INSIDE VIEW OF LEXILE MEASURES:

AN INTERVIEW WITH MALBERT SMITH III

Interview conducted by
Carl A. Harvey II, AASL
President-Elect
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Malbert Smith III (msmith@lexile.com) is president of MetaMetrics, Inc., an educational measurement and research organization in Durham, North Carolina. Together with cofounder and CEO A. Jackson Stenner, Dr. Smith created the Lexile Framework for Reading; El Sistema Lexile para Leer, the Spanish-language version of the widely used reading framework; the Lexile Framework for Writing; and the Quantile Framework for Mathematics. At events he frequently speaks on educational research and measurement.
Has this ever happened to you? A teacher, parent, or central-office administrator comes to you and says, “I think we should rearrange the library so that all the books are grouped by Lexile level (or Guided Reading level, Accelerated Reader level, etc.).”

Of course, your initial gut response would be to exclaim, “Are you crazy?”

Ideally, you would keep that response to yourself and instead explain why leveling the library might not make the most sense.

Many text-leveling systems are available, and each has its own process for determining how to best match a reader with appropriate reading materials. While these systems can support educators in helping students become better readers, a disconnect often arises when implementation shifts from using the system to help guide instruction, to completely taking over everything, including leveling the library collection. These extreme measures typically are not how the creators of the systems intended them to be used.

As librarians, we need to research and understand the leveling system in play—what is its purpose and how should it be implemented?

With this baseline understanding, we can then start to think in terms of how the library can support a leveling system without compromising the basic foundations of our field.

Based on this premise, I talked with Dr. Malbert Smith III, president of MetaMetrics and part of the team that created the widely adopted Lexile Framework for Reading. I asked him about some of the concerns librarians might have about leveling systems and the extreme measures that have sometimes negatively impacted school libraries. While we focused on Lexile measures, it is important to note that many of the questions and issues could apply to any leveling system. What’s important is how these issues and questions are addressed in support of students as they develop their reading skills.

**CARL A. HARVEY:** What’s the history of the Lexile Framework for Reading? Why was the system created?

**MALBERT SMITH:** MetaMetrics created The Lexile Framework for Reading to provide a common scale and metric for measuring reading ability. The Lexile Framework allows for students to be matched with “targeted” texts at the right level of complexity to encourage reading growth, and to compare reading achievement levels across the content areas, grade levels, and states. The National Institutes of Health initially funded our work through a series of grants. These grants supported the research on reading and psychometric theory that fueled the development of the Lexile Framework. The Lexile Framework is based on more than twenty years of ongoing research by MetaMetrics cofounder Dr. A. Jackson Stenner; Dr. Donald Burdick, MetaMetrics senior scientist and professor emeritus of statistics, Duke University; and faculty from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the University of Chicago.

**CAH:** How is a Lexile measure determined?

**MS:** There are two types of Lexile measures: a Lexile reader measure and a Lexile text measure. A Lexile reader measure indicates a student’s reading ability on the Lexile scale and is determined by having the student take a reading comprehension test that has been linked with the Lexile Framework. A complete list of assessments and programs that report students’ reading scores as Lexile measures is available on the Lexile website <www.lexile.com/about-lexile/How-to-get-lexile-measures>. Each year, about 35 million U.S. K–12 students receive a Lexile measure from one of these reading assessments and programs. Similarly, a Lexile text measure indicates the complexity of a text, such as a book or article, on the same Lexile scale. A Lexile text

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**Carl A. Harvey II** is the school librarian at North Elementary School in Noblesville, Indiana, and president–elect of the American Association of School Librarians.

**While a Lexile measure is a valuable piece of information in the book–selection process, it’s important to note that the Lexile measure is only one piece of information to consider when selecting a book for a specific student.**
We do not find it necessary to reorganize a library by Lexile range or level.
While a Lexile measure is a valuable piece of information in the book-selection process, it’s important to note that the Lexile measure is only one piece of information to consider when selecting a book for a specific student. Other factors, such as the content and quality of the text, and the student’s interests and reading goals, should also be considered. A Lexile measure is a great starting point, but it is not intended to replace the role of an educator, librarian, or parent in helping students pick books that will support growth toward the reading demands of their future endeavors.

In short, we believe that students should be matched with targeted text to reduce frustration and foster a love of reading. In certain instructional contexts, it is best to target students within their Lexile range. But in other contexts—as factors like background knowledge and motivation dictate—students should be allowed to read outside of their Lexile range. We have found that most students prefer to read targeted text, especially for independent reading. After all, we all have had the experience of selecting a book that was too difficult to understand and enjoy. We certainly do not want students to experience that same frustration.

CAH: Often librarians are asked to recommend to students only titles that are within their Lexile ranges. This can be difficult when a student’s Lexile range is high, but the content is not developmentally or age-appropriate. What do you suggest for students who have a high Lexile measure, but the majority of books written in their Lexile range are not topic- or age-appropriate?

MS: There are two particularly challenging scenarios: 1) a student is either overage for his or her grade, or is reading at a Lexile level that is lower than grade expectations; and 2) a student has a Lexile measure that far exceeds grade-level expectations. A successful strategy for the first scenario involves locating high-low books with age-appropriate jacket art. MetaMetrics’ staff is constantly assessing high-low texts, which receive a Lexile code of “HL” (for high-low).

The second scenario requires a different strategy. There are now more than 400 million periodical articles with Lexile measures that can be accessed through school library resources like EBSCO, ProQuest, and NewsBank. These resources allow advanced readers to search on topics of interest and Lexile range, thus promoting targeted reading for advanced readers.

Of course, we should never discourage pleasure reading, even when those books are well below the student’s Lexile measure. Many years ago an elementary school librarian instilled in me a passion for reading, and the value of this gift in my life cannot be overestimated.

CAH: What role do you think school librarians could support using Lexile measures in their schools?

MS: Lexile measures help to strengthen the connection between the classroom and the library. When librarians know students’ Lexile measures and the instructional resources that are available to teachers, librarians can help teachers match students with reading materials at their ability level across the content areas. MetaMetrics has partnered with all of the major periodical database providers, including EBSCO, ProQuest, and NewsBank, to provide Lexile measures for newspaper and magazine articles, as well as for encyclopedia and reference content. This range of materials with Lexile measures enables librarians to extend the school library collection and support teachers in differentiating instruction. Furthermore, librarians can support summer reading by helping students use “Find a Book” <www.lexile.com/fab> to build reading lists prior to the end of the school year, encouraging students to participate in community reading programs, and even allowing them to check out books from the school library over summer break. This support may be especially helpful for high-poverty students who live in low-literacy environments and are at a loss for ability-appropriate reading materials at home.

Concluding Thoughts from Carl

The success of any reading-level system or program ultimately depends on how a school implements it. After all, we’ve all witnessed initiatives where either no one followed through or someone went too far. As librarians, we must be proactive, and that means being part of the literacy conversations happening at our schools so that we can avoid the “leveling” discussion at the beginning of this article. As school library leaders, we will be at the forefront of the conversations that affect our libraries and can better position them as resources to support school programs—without sacrificing the core beliefs of our field.

Recommended Reading

With the adoption of the Reading Renaissance principles of Accelerated Reader, students at Pittsburg Community Middle School (PCMS) have gone from not making Reading AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) to making Standard of Excellence in reading each year since 2007. In Kansas, this distinction requires a complicated spreadsheet formula based on Kansas Assessment Scores.
Key Elements of AR
In their requirements for Model and Master Classroom, Library, and School Certification, Renaissance Learning, the parent company of Accelerated Reader (AR), emphasizes the components for a successful reading program. These practices are listed on their website <www.renlearn.com>. Teachers emphasize successful independent reading practice by guiding students to read on a level that will lead to successfully completing a point goal, an average percent correct goal that refers to comprehension, and a reading-level improvement goal. Teachers have an active role in setting goals with student input, assisting with book selection, and monitoring progress during daily thirty-minute reading periods. School librarians’ responsibilities include building a strong curriculum collection that integrates AR books, providing maximum student access to both books and computers, and promoting reading. When selecting books, I rely on reviews first and AR quiz availability second. A plethora of quality materials are available. Using Reading Renaissance requires emphasis on literacy throughout the entire school and makes the job of the school librarian a key leadership role.

Accelerated Reader is based on individual guided reading practice, which allows readers to work at their own levels and choose books that reflect their own interests. Planning how to achieve a personal goal becomes an exercise in problem-solving, which allows the school librarian to become a readers’ advisor and to coach students in book selection, comprehension strategies, and planning.
Students carry books throughout the day and are expected to read whenever they have time.

librarian to become a readers’ advisor and to coach students in book selection, comprehension strategies, and planning. Students can read a short book daily, a medium-length book weekly, a long book throughout nine weeks, or any combination they choose. Because AR is so individualized, I’ve seen programs work well at elementary, middle, and high school levels.

Our Expectations for PCMS Students

AR reading goals form the Tier One Response to Intervention (RTI) reading intervention, which is successful for 80 percent of our PCMS students. The RTI model, as documented by Rachel Brown-Chidsey and Mark W. Steege in Response to Intervention: Principles and Strategies for Effective Practice, 2nd ed., has been implemented nationally, and in Kansas is known as Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS). Tier 2 and Tier 3 students need the most intensive help to catch up, and so they also participate in small-group and individual instruction. When we chose Renaissance Reading, I was asked to chair the Reading Committee. We focused our professional development on training for effective use. In-services always included at least a thirty-minute session on one aspect of implementation. Students carry books throughout the day and are expected to read whenever they have time. Each student has a target reading period based on thirty minutes of in-school individual practice time daily.

During each nine weeks, students are expected to reach three goals: 85 percent correct goal, point goal, and book-level goal. The book-level goal is set as the bottom of the students’ individual reading zones, and students are allowed to read any books of their choosing with the expectation that their book-level averages must fall within their zones by the end of the quarter. Even our students reading at the twelfth-grade level never have a book-level goal above 4.5. Their reading is truly self-selected and unrestricted. The only exception: Students must read in their zone when they read half-point books, which are very short books like The Cat in the Hat. We also require two nonfiction books, two vocabulary quizzes, and one literacy skills test per quarter. These requirements give students exposure to expository and technical text, as well as vocabulary work and twenty-four key literary standards. Students read for rewards like AR parties; they also read because 20 percent of their language arts grade is based on their meeting AR goals. Nancy Everhart reported in her cross-cultural research that, according to Judy Cameron and W. David Pierce, teacher praise and constructive feedback are motivational (Everhart 2005, 2). The most powerful motivator is personal attention and recognition, so we discuss books and authors, we celebrate successful quizzes, and we share the joy of finding those really special stories.

Related Research

Accelerated Reader works because it is research-based. Stephen Krashen’s book The Power of Reading: Insights from the Research provided a meta-analysis that helped make the case for a free-reading program instead of the proposed scripted program. Krashen states, “Reading is consistently shown to be more efficient than direct instruction” (Krashen 2004, 17). Krashen lists the four components of AR and points out that the first two—that children have substantial access to books, and that they select their own books and read them for sixty minutes daily—have been shown to increase reading proficiency (Krashen 2004, 119–20). Carol Gordon (2010) echoes Krashen’s key points that students need time for active practice during sustained silent reading, free choice, access to books, and intrinsic motivation. AR allows students to maximize these positive factors.

The third component of AR is that the tests focus on literal meaning. When the reading coordinator and I spent three years monitoring reading practice measured by Accelerated Reader, we observed that students who achieved twenty-five AR points per quarter, totaling 100 points per year, consistently scored well on the Kansas Assessment. This reading test requires reading a passage and choosing the answer from four multiple-choice possibilities. This is exactly the format of Accelerated Reader quizzes. Tim Shanahan noted that because the quizzes mirror standardized tests, “students are just getting a lot of testing practice” (Oppenheimer 2003, 29). Therefore, AR is a very compatible format for test preparation.

It is the fourth component, children getting prizes for the points earned on a test, that is the most controversial. However, this rewards system is not intrinsic to the AR program (Krashen 2003, 19). In his article “The (Lack of) Experimental Evidence Supporting the Use of Accelerated Reader,” he concluded: “The results presented here strongly suggest that of the four aspects of
AR, access to books, time devoted to reading, tests, and rewards, only the first two are supported by research.” Since these are the most critical two components, I believe the positive far outweighs the questions raised by Betty Carter in “Hold the Applause!” (1996) and Alfie Kohn in Punished by Rewards (1999). In a perfect world, my middle school students would all come to school each day eagerly anticipating reading, but that simply isn’t the case. We try to focus our motivators and rewards as positively, intrinsically, and personally as possible, but the reality is that we live in a No Child Left Behind world, and we must get our students reading, both for lifelong enjoyment and in time for the spring assessments.

Responding to Criticism

School librarians who are removing program labels while their students are still required to use the programs are picking the wrong battle. I understand the school librarians’ concerns: I did not put any dots on my books until the students convinced me how helpful the dots would be. The dots are small, placed below the spine label, and complete information with reading level, points, and vocabulary words is inside the book cover. Students are allowed to check out any book at any level.

In her letter to SLJ, Valerie Kinney states that she wants “students to learn the right way to use a library” (2010). My labels do not interfere with students’ library use; the labels simply provide the students with additional information as they select their books. As David Loertscher advocates, one of the school librarian’s main functions is to build partnerships with teachers no matter the obstacles (1988, 26). Although Loertscher is not a fan of AR, he advocates for evidence...
of school library impact combined with emphasis on the amount of reading practice. I argue that AR gives me both. It is not always easy to guide teachers to the most effective use of AR, but successful collaboration will create a win-win-win situation for the students, teachers, and school librarian.

AR has been recognized as effective by What Works Clearinghouse, Student Progress Monitoring, Florida Center for Reading Research, and National Dropout Prevention Center/Network, and as a Best in Tech 2009 for RTI Assessments Solution. Renaissance Learning conducts research that guides teachers to effective use of the program. Tim Shanahan, a member of the National Reading Panel, which did not accept the Renaissance company’s research, said, “Renaissance Learning deserves some credit just for putting themselves on the line” (Oppenheimer 2003, 15). There are plenty of horror stories about misuse of this program, but it gives educators evidence of reading practice. It is a sustained silent reading program with accountability and motivation built in. Reports highlight exactly which students need intervention to be successful readers. It is easy to match students’ reading levels by both grade equivalent and Lexile measure. Since over 140,000 quizzes are available, and new books are automatically added to the database weekly, virtually every new book reviewed in journals like School Library Journal and Booklist becomes an AR book.

I was disappointed that Kelly Gallagher chose this as “bad news” about AR. “Students can only read books found on the AR list. If a good book is not on the list, students are not allowed to read it” (Gallagher 2009, 74). This is simply not true at my school. Meeting students’ interests is easy due to the number of quizzes available. If a student wants to read a book for which there is no quiz, that student has the option of creating a quiz, giving students virtually unlimited choice. AR gives me information about helping students find books. I can see at a glance which students might need more personal attention. Combined with evidence of the quality and quantity of reading practice, AR can be the cornerstone of a powerful program.

**Motivation**

Motivation is an integral part of AR. I noticed this when the program was first released (so long ago that I had to load each quiz from a set of floppy disks). Students asked to test even though no incentives were in place and participation was strictly voluntary. Our teachers and paraprofessionals participate along with our students and provide good models for successful reading by sharing book recommendations, having book discussions with students, and being pictured on our Reading Wall of Fame. Our students chart their progress, conference with their teachers, and share their books with friends. The Home Connect link provides a personalized graphic bookshelf that students love to review and can easily share with their parents.

Accelerated Reader gives teachers evidence that students actually read their books. The old model of reading record keeping was to have parents sign a reading log; that log gave no evidence of comprehension, the key to reading success. Book reports are also an imperfect model. When I began teaching language arts in the late 1970s,
the argument was that requiring book reports killed any chance of students becoming lifelong readers. The criticism has been raised that students cheat on AR tests, but this is minimized when teachers monitor their students’ reading during the daily reading period.

Recognition: Reading Wall of Fame

The most exciting component of our reading program has come from recognizing our students on the Reading Wall of Fame. Every student and teacher who reads a million words or a hundred books, or masters a hundred vocabulary words receives a certificate and recognition on the Wall of Fame. The student’s photo and the cover of his or her favorite book are posted. Adding favorite books is my way of having students recommend books to each other and reflect on their reading tastes. Not just our top readers earn the million-word award. A diverse group of students become motivated by tracking their word counts through the year. Focusing on words has transformed our AR program: Students and parents understand that words are important. I tell students that they can all be on the Wall of Fame, and with a little effort, they can.

The hundred-book award is designed for reluctant readers. Our students with learning disabilities are very successful in reading one hundred books. They can read short books and test daily. Our ESL students are encouraged to read and test in both English and Spanish. Recognizing reading that ESL students do in both their first and second languages encourages pleasure reading, improves reading skills, and allows students to expand their knowledge of both languages. ESL readers generally reach one hundred books at about the same rate our readers for whom English is a first language reach a million words. When a non–English-speaking student moved in during the year, we created an award for her so she could be recognized for reading seventy-six Spanish-language books. Students also quickly discover that the mastery of one hundred vocabulary words is very attainable. Each vocabulary quiz contains five or ten words, which accumulate quickly. Every year, a handful of students collect all three recognitions.

One of my favorite recognitions was of Dalton,1 a reluctant eighth-grade reader. “Oh man,” he groaned when I presented his million-word award, “I really was trying not to get this!” I had picked up that he liked the Michael L. Printz Award books and borrowed them from the high school, so I had a new one ready for him each time he finished one—I lured him into reading a million words in spite of himself! I talked to him during his sophomore year, and he is still a reader.

The Wall is also a visual picture of the individuality of reading tastes; last year, the most popular author was Stephenie Meyer, who was chosen only 20 times out of 441 different books. The reward of personal recognition for reading achievement has been motivating beyond belief. Students linger over the pictures on the Wall, to recognize themselves and their friends, but also to discuss the books that are featured.

Building a Collection Kids Love

Book selection has been critical in the success of the Accelerated Reader program. Every single one of my twelve thousand fiction books is an AR book as is most of my nonfiction collection. I buy books with starred reviews, titles with five or more reviews, and award winners. I especially focus on half-point books at the third- and fourth-grade reading level, books for reluctant readers (recommended for grades 4–6, 6–8, and 8 and up), and nonfiction half-point books. I do not order a book unless I can name the student who will want to read it. Swords: An Artist’s Devotion is an example of a very highly recommended book that I hesitated to buy until I realized that it would be perfect for Johnathan and Matthew. They both love it and have shown it to their friends. When students want a book not in my library, I immediately make interlibrary loan a priority and consider adding the book to the next order. Several years ago, when Pittsburg opened a skate park, I ordered thirty AR skateboarding books. Last year I added all the new wrestling, football, vampire, and zombie books that I could find. My selection decisions are driven by student requests.

PCMS students are discriminating readers who discover exactly what they like to read and keep up with the latest publications by their favorite authors. They can articulate their favorite genres. Never before in thirty–two years of school librarianship have I had students regularly report to me the exact release dates for the next book in their favorite series. Thanks to J. K. Rowling, series are more popular than ever, and readers faithfully follow them. Never before have I had so many readers reading so many diverse series. This transformation is due to the adoption of an AR reading program that emphasizes student choice for independent practice.

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1 Students’ real names have not been used.
The Payoff
Not only have Kansas Assessment Scores revealed that PCMS students have achieved Standard of Excellence rating, our students now demonstrate that they enjoy reading. For the last five years students at PCMS have read an average of forty books each. I have seen students like Richie develop from non-readers to capable, motivated readers. When I worked with Richie in sixth grade during the after-school reading program, he could not decode meaning from a basic picture book. We worked night after night reading and rereading the picture books of his choice and in his reading zone. Richie progressed and during his eighth-grade year, Richie read independently every James Patterson novel on the AR Quiz list. We celebrate successes like Richie’s every day. Adoption of the Renaissance Reading program enables the school librarian to become a reading leader and a key player in student achievement.

Representative Student Comments Collected at PCMS April 7, 2010
These quotes from Library Snapshot Day are similar to the positive remarks collected in the “Teens Love-Hate Relationships with Reading” article published recently in School Library Journal (2010). Teens value reading when they can choose their own books, it meets their intellectual and social needs, and they feel transported.

“I like the library because there are nice people, and I can always find a good book.”

“I like to read to get my AR goal and find new books to read.”

“The library helps me get into reading. I used to think reading was boring.”

“The library is a place for me to relax and read.”

“I get the chance to find books I’ve never seen before but find out that they’re really good.”

“They can answer my questions, and I love to read books.”

“The library has gotten me hooked on a really good series.”

“The library improves vocabulary.”

“I have read over a million words, and it makes me keep my grades up.”

“I like all of the good books to choose from.”

“I like the library because it smells good, like my grandma and grandpa’s house.”

Cindy Pfeiffer is a school librarian at Pittsburg (KS) Community Middle School.
Works Cited:


PERSONAL P
Imagine a nontechnical person being given the timed task of repairing an automobile and receiving a grade for that task. The person starts to sweat and anxiety builds. Successful completion of the task is extremely unlikely. Compare that scenario with a student who has reading difficulties, knowing that this ability will impact all aspects of his or her school career and grades. The importance of reading is evident in every aspect of schooling and affects all areas of a student’s daily life.

A study conducted at Delsea Regional Middle School in the 2007–2008 school year made apparent the need for implementing additional reading programs to improve literacy skills (Williams 2009). The programs needed to go beyond the basic remediation programs already in place. The baseline data collected in the study showed that students actually had to alter their thoughts and feelings about reading. Only 22 percent of middle school students surveyed listed reading as an after-school activity. In addition, between 30 and 40 percent of the faculty surveyed rarely or never engaged in silent or oral reading with students in the middle school classroom (Williams 2009). So if students were not reading throughout their day at home and in school, how can the necessary mind shift occur for them?

At Delsea Regional High School in Franklinville, New Jersey, teachers (along with the school librarian) work to alter students’ feelings about reading by using a variety of reading programs including the computerized reading management program, Accelerated Reader (AR). Delsea goes beyond the basics of the program to make it unique, personalizing it to fit the individual needs of students, particularly those in special education and remedial reading programs.

Why would a student who has difficulty with reading like to read? The literature shows that students who struggle with reading rarely get free time to read (Sanacore 2002, Stanovich 1986). Struggling readers spend so much time in remediation programs that free reading for enjoyment is limited.
Add to that the fact that struggling readers find free reading unpleasant (Hughes-Hassell and Rodge 2007, Moats 2001, Strickland and Walker 2004) and the lack of interest in free reading makes sense. By instituting time, and providing opportunities and resources for pleasure reading, schools can help to reduce negative feelings toward reading while fostering an environment of literacy for all students (Goodman 1991, Routman 2003).

Adapting AR to Delsea
The use of AR at Delsea Regional High School is not simply one-size-fits-all. Since its inception in the district in 2003, AR has been used as a supplemental reading program with students in special education and remedial reading/writing classes in the high school. The program’s company, Renaissance Learning, does provide research-based best practices to use AR, and, although many of those best practices are in place at Delsea, the usage of AR has been specifically adapted to best meet the needs of special education and remedial readers. The goal of the program has been to help students gain confidence in reading to become self-motivated readers.

The implementation of AR at the school has been an evolving process with flexibility to meet the particular needs of students who “don’t like reading.” Point values for books and rewards for reading have never been emphasized at Delsea High School. The emphasis has been for students to select—from among the thousands of books with available quizzes—books that relate to readers’ interests. The premise is that students will be more successful in reading and in finishing books if they are more engaged in the topic. They will read carefully and earn higher percentage scores on the quizzes when they care about what they are reading. One student commented that since they get to pick their own books, they actually enjoy reading. Additionally, another student stated, “Reading is fun, if you find something interesting to read about.”

If students are not successful on quizzes (scoring less than 70 percent), the teacher or the school librarian is able to talk individually with students about what additional strategies can be used to reach each student’s goal and encourage students to be successful in reading. For example, does the student need to take better reading logs or write more detailed reading summary sheets? Did the student read only parts of the book? Or perhaps the learner needs to select another book (on his or her reading level) that better matches particular interests.
Each student receives an individual reading goal based on a specific reading level, which is determined by Renaissance Learning’s STAR Reading assessment. Each student participates in setting individual goals and makes decisions about an acceptable grade above the minimum score as well as the activities to be completed to help meet that grade. These decisions are made through conferences between student and teacher with ongoing opportunities to evaluate goals. Additionally, students are permitted to retake quizzes after rereading books and reviewing their reading logs. Furthermore, students have opportunities to discuss their reading with teachers or the school librarian, after which quiz grades can be modified to reflect their understanding (comprehension) of the book. Another way that Delsea works to customize AR is by giving students the option of reading a book without a quiz, and writing their own questions and multiple choice answers for that book. (The AR program has an option whereby quizzes can manually be entered into the system.) The student then “field-tests” the quiz by taking the computerized quiz. This allows students to have unlimited opportunities for selection of reading materials.

Students receive reading certificates each time they achieve a reading goal (receiving a 70 percent on a quiz or achieving a point goal). The certificates reinforce the idea that not only are students learning to read, but they are also learning that reading for pleasure is enjoyable. Receiving a passing grade on an AR quiz is a major accomplishment for them, and this may be the first time that they have received recognition for their academic achievement. In the past, since reading is difficult for them, they often did not even try. Now students experience success and are surprised that they can read. The glow on their faces when students pass their first quiz is priceless.

At the end of each marking period, students who have met their reading goals are invited to a reading celebration. Pictures are taken at this event and posted on the school library webpage. Students look forward to this event as recognition for their reading achievements.

Three questions serve to maximize student motivation and their achievement: “Where are they going with their learning? Where am I now? How can I close the gap?”

By involving students in their learning and allowing them to participate in decision making related to their reading goals, AR is helping to give them ownership of their learning. Students no longer feel defeated by reading.

Receiving a passing grade on an AR quiz is a major accomplishment for them, and this may be the first time that they have received recognition for their academic achievement. In
using STAR Reading and by customizing AR, students are active participants in their learning. Students are part of the reading instruction process, and are engaged in planning and reflecting upon their growth as readers. They become cognizant of what strategies might help them to improve their reading. Students confer with their teacher and the school librarian, and learn that through reading more slowly and carefully taking notes, selecting appropriate books for their reading levels, and by simply reading more regularly, they can enhance their reading skills and learn to enjoy the activity. Student reflections support the conclusions that AR has helped them learn to read more slowly, leading to a better understanding of what they are reading, and that AR has helped to improve their reading since they now read every day in class.

Each marking period the teachers and the school librarian review what worked and what did not work for students, and tweak the student requirements. The school librarian and teachers are collaborative partners in the process. They work together to develop goals with an emphasis on student comprehension and having students learn the enjoyment of reading. Students begin to see themselves as readers. Strategies that encourage development of this perception include allowing students to select reading materials from what interests them, providing a variety of reading logs and other reading summary sheets to help students keep track of their reading and assist them with remembering details for the quiz and conferencing with teachers, which provides opportunities for students to discuss their reading. Students comment that they feel that their reading confidence has improved through involvement in the AR program.

Perks of the Program

The impetus for including AR as a supplemental reading program at Delsea was the recognition that reluctant readers needed to become more aware of their own personal reading habits and the benefits of reading. Once students reach high school, reading for pleasure occurs much less due to a variety of factors such as time constraints and extracurricular activities (Sanacore 2002). When the only reading students do is from textbooks in a structured setting, they tend to see reading as a chore rather than an enjoyable activity (Strickland and Walker 2004). One of the students involved in the AR program stated, “I read for the fun of it now.” Another student commented that the favorite part of using AR is that it provides a quiet time to relax and enjoy a good book.

Other outcomes of the AR program, beyond an increase in free reading, include a boost in library circulation along with an added opportunity for the school librarian to interact with the students. The school librarian is able to make reading recommendations, to discuss what students are reading, and to encourage students with reading. Students are also making book recommendations to other students and discussing their reading with each other. Students often inquire when specific books will be returned as they are looking forward to reading the next book in a series. The school
Is AR the definitive answer to improving the reading of those students with reading deficiencies? Delsea’s answer is “No.” However, AR is one component of a literacy program that has been successfully implemented at Delsea to encourage reading and have students develop an intrinsic motivation for reading. Research and literature reveal that the best reading practice has been reading (Lee-Daniels and Murray 2000). The literature also states that students who read for pleasure experience greater success (Cunningham and Stanovich 2001, Gardiner 2001, Krashen 2006). AR provides time to practice reading in school and promotes student choice, thereby fostering a pleasant experience. Students begin to see themselves as readers as they experience success with the program and celebrate the personal victories involved in finishing a book. The key to success is that reading becomes an intrinsic behavior.
FEATURE

THE WONDERS OF WEIRD

ALBINO ANIMALS

CRYPTIDS
By forcing gifted educators to teach in preparation for state testing and national assessments, the joy of discovery is becoming an endangered species, and learning is becoming a chore rather than an opportunity.

Author, teacher, and literacy expert Kelly Gallagher and others have sounded the alarm: Schools are committing readicide. Gallagher says, “...in chasing test scores, we are killing the love of reading...” (Gallagher n.d., Part I).

By forcing gifted educators to teach in preparation for state testing and national assessments, the joy of discovery is becoming an endangered species, and learning is becoming a chore rather than an opportunity.

Is it possible to strike a more reasonable balance? Gallagher suggests a 50/50 approach. Half of academic endeavor should be in direct response to state testing—preparation and high-level, analytical challenge. The other half should include a healthy dose of fun.

"We should be doing a lot more... in our classrooms to foster recreational reading habits in our kids, surrounding them with high-interest books—not just reading Shakespeare” (Gallagher n.d., Part II).

That’s where writers like me come in. And we are eager to help.

I’ve made my living for the past two decades being weird. At least that’s what I tell the kids when I do school visits, but it’s not far from the truth. I write quirky nonfiction for reluctant readers—on purpose. I believe some reading ought to be fun, even for kids who think they don’t like to read.

Why? The answer is two-fold. First, when I was a kid, I hated to read, unless I could find biographies about Abraham Lincoln, factual guides on reptiles and amphibians, or books about vampires. Second, it seemed to me there were only a few “good” books in my school library. Good, in that case, meant interesting by my own very narrow standards. Never did “award winning” come to mind.

Alternative Connections

Today, I write for the reader I once was. I write books kids think are fun to read, and the endeavor has been exceptionally rewarding. Feedback is readily offered as I visit schools and talk with thousands of kids. "I love what you write," so many tell me, "because your books are really fun to read."

_Dinosaur Mummies_ (Darby Creek 2003) was an exploration of fossilized soft tissue. In adult terms, it sounds sophisticated, even
intriguing, and it is. Translated for young readers, its more basic appeal is crystal clear. We’re used to the fossilization of ancient bones. But did you know other dinosaur parts can fossilize too?

Through the use of touchable fossil replicas, I help the kids understand that ancient dinosaurs have much in common with students’ modern-day animal favorites. Fossilized dinosaur hearts, lungs, muscles, claws, and skin make the readers’ realm of research seem gross and disgusting and cool.

At the close of a school visit in a rural Washington elementary, one second-grader lingered with his school librarian and me, reverently tracing his finger over a replica of fossilized dinosaur skin. Again and again, I’d explained the fossils were replicas, copies of the real thing, as I talked about the pages of my book.

“I wanted to tell you something,” he said, looking up at me. “You look just like my grandmother.”

“Is she nice?” I asked in response.

“She’s the nicest,” he said. “She’s just like you. In fact,” he said, the wheels turning in his head, “you may just be a grandmother replica.”

I thought I was talking about dinosaur soft tissue—guts and gore—but that young man connected with “replica.” Either way, the school librarian and I agreed, the end results had been exceptional.

**Exploring Differences**

Something similar happened when I first presented *Albino Animals* (Darby Creek 2004) to school children in an urban Texas school. The book explores dozens of animals with one thing in common—albinism. A hiccup in genetic code robbed each animal of its ability to create pigment. Without melanin, the animals’ eyes seem pink, and their skin and hair are white—they are completely free of color.

I explained the inspiration for the book was a young African American girl with albinism. The concept boggled their minds. We began to explore the complexities of race, via the absence of color in animals.

At the close of the presentation, I shared a photo of a Caucasian teen from England who’d asked me to include her in the book.

“Let’s look again,” I said. “Does she REALLY look creepy? Because to me, creepy is that scary guy in the toy store that follows you around for no good reason.”

She and the other kids laughed, so I continued. “Is she really creepy, or is she just different?”

"I think she’s just different,” the little girl said with a smile.

"Exactly," I said. "And different can be very, very good." Once again, through nontraditional subject matter, we made our way to discovery with remarkable potential reach. Reading for fun inspired a very educational discussion.

My most popular book *Tales of the Cryptids* (Darby Creek 2006) may be the most powerful example of books battling readicide—at least in my current body of work. I set out to prove most creatures of cryptozoology, legendary animals like Bigfoot and the Loch Ness Monster, were not real. My research results were sometimes surprising, even to me.

Some of the cryptids were real. Some were false. But most were uncertain, with evidence for and against their true existence. Rather than take the traditional stance and declare them all hoaxes, I took a more honest journalistic approach. I shared the information I found, both for and against each animal’s credibility, and left it for each adventurous reader to decide.

My choice was to not make unfounded assumptions, to present...
the evidence realistically, and then trust the kids to make assessments of their own. This opened up the magic of discussion and further discovery. Again and again, kids read the information and drew smart, informed conclusions of their own.

Elementary students in Atlanta created cryptids of their own, inspired and informed by those featured in Tales of the Cryptids. Teachers required detailed written information on each creature’s habitat, food sources, and survival techniques. If one cryptid ate meat, what special skills had it developed to catch its prey? If another lived underwater, did it have lungs or gills? Did it rise to the surface for a breath of air, as Loch Ness Monster allegedly does, or could it draw oxygen from water with aquatic gills?

Excited by engaging subject matter, the kids not only read, but wrote, researched, and illustrated imaginary cryptids of their own. How did young readers research animals that do not exist? Comparative zoology. Paleontologists use the technique when studying dinosaurs that no longer exist. Compare imaginary habitats to real habitats, imaginary teeth to real teeth, imaginary food chains to real food chains, and then extrapolate. For example, one girl created an animal with a rainbow fur pattern. When asked where that coat would blend in, she solved the problem. “My animal lives in a candy factory.” A flower garden would have been another realistic option for her. Just ask the average butterfly.

One sixth-grader in Pennsylvania challenged me on my research for Mysteries of the Mummy Kids (Darby Creek 2007), a book about mummies mummified before they turned eighteen. Each body, preserved with intent or by accident, had been a kid when it passed from its life on Earth.

“You missed something,” the young girl said as I entered her classroom. She was clutching the book with absolute respect.

I asked what I missed, delighted she’d cared enough to do research of her own.

“This baby on the cover,” she said, pointing to one of Greenland’s most sympathetic Qilakitsog mummies, an infant. “They probably just let her die.”

I nodded in agreement. Experts suspect that when the nursing baby’s mother died in a hunting accident, the baby was left to die, as well. Her family unit had no other way to feed a baby so young in the dead of Greenland’s winter. When the young girl asked me why I left that part out, I said, “That’s a great question. When I talked to the scientist who found her, he said the baby may have died in the same accident. He couldn’t be sure, so I left it out because I didn’t want to risk lying to you.”


Using high interest topics—dead kids—I drew in non-readers who THOUGHT they had no use for reading. This young girl hadn’t read more than two books—voluntarily—all year. The fact that she’d not only read mine but had done more research on her own was extremely telling.

All of my book topics—past, present, and future—are selected with these reluctant readers in mind. Few of my books will ever win high-profile awards. But when hundreds of kids write to me, speak to me, confess to me that they hate reading, but they love my books, my path is powerfully clear.

I will continue to work hard to give educators strong, well-crafted, high-interest alternatives to more traditional educational nonfiction. I will reach beyond literary perfection to provide bait for those very discerning reluctant readers. If my effort helps stem the spread of readicide, I will be proud.

If I can help you save even one kid from feeling lost in the sea of reading possibility, I will have done my job. Kelly Gallagher, I’ll be one of your unknown soldiers, as long as I can offer ammunition that helps hit the mark.


Works Cited:

Here’s the key idea: Give kids the books they want to read. If the books are good ones—cool ones, funny ones, fat ones, skinny ones—our kids will thank us. Maybe for the rest of their lives.

So how do you avoid this thing we’re calling “readicide”? Here goes.

1. **THE FIRST TIP:** The absolute best way to get most kids reading is to give them books they’re going to love. Honest, it’s that simple.

Here’s a scary fact: millions of kids in America have never read a book they liked. Not one book. That’s sad.

2. **THE SECOND TIP:** It’s our job to help parents and teachers find the books that our children will love.

3. **THE THIRD TIP:** Listen, really listen when the kids talk to you. They know what they like and what they don’t like. They’ll tell you as long as they believe you hear them.

Okay, so how do we go about identifying these terrific books that our kids are going to devour?

That’s a place where I can help. I’ve started a website ReadKiddoRead <ReadKiddoRead.com>. A couple hundred selections are listed at the site—all books that will turn kids on to reading. The books are divided up like this: illustrated books (for ages up to six), transitional books (for ages six and up), pageturners (for ages eight and up), and books that are more difficult, but worth the extra effort (for ages ten and up).

But we all know you’re already the experts. Problem is, you don’t have the time to create lists for every parent or teacher who needs suggestions. Think of my site as a place to refer them—an answer for those who need some guidance in finding the right books (because they do).
Parents may find encouragement in what my wife Sue and I did with our son, Jack. We went out and found a dozen books we knew he would probably love. The first summer, he groaned a little. The next summer, he started picking up books on his own. And the following summer, he was absolutely addicted. We started this when Jack was eight. He’s thirteen now, loves books, and is a very strong reader.

Here are a few more ideas to suggest to parents and teachers.

One mom on ReadKiddoRead said she lets her kids keep the light on at night, as long as they’re reading.

A father suggested that it’s important that the whole family read together. Different books, different interests, but it’s important for kids to see us reading. A lot of movies are made from books—so why not read those books together, either before or after you see the movie.

One librarian told me that she puts just as much energy into talking to kids about their favorite new bestseller as she does their reports on the books in the literary canon. Any passion for reading is rewarded.

Here’s the key idea: Give kids the books they want to read. If the books are good ones—cool ones, funny ones, fat ones, skinny ones—our kids will thank us. Maybe for the rest of their lives.

Here are some excellent picks from 2010 (see sidebar).
James Patterson is the bestselling author of the Maximum Ride novels, the Witch & Wizard series, Med Head, and detective series featuring Alex Cross and the Women’s Murder Club.

Great Reads by James Patterson

Middle School. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers
Maximum Ride. Yen Press
Witch & Wizard. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers
Maximum Ride. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers
Daniel X. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers

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