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ABOUT THE GREAT STORIES CLUB

Giving underserved youth the opportunity to read, reflect, and share ideas

Literature provides not only a gateway of empathy into the lives of others, but also a mirror for readers whose lives have been affected by difficult circumstances.

The American Library Association’s Great Stories Club helps library workers bring those insights to underserved teenagers through a unique book club and discussion group that uses powerful stories to engage and inspire.

There are two ways for libraries to participate in the Great Stories Club.

- **Apply for a Great Stories Club grant** from ALA (see page 4). Libraries selected for a Great Stories Club grant get copies of theme-related books to use in reading and discussion groups of 8 to 10 teens; in-person and online training on humanities content; dialogue facilitation training; and a variety of programming and promotional support materials.

- **Use ALA’s Great Stories Club resources** to lead your own book club for underserved youth (see page 5). All resources created for Great Stories Club grantees — including book lists, discussion questions, promotional materials, and supplemental program ideas — are available to all libraries, free of charge, on ala.org/greatstories.

Whichever way you choose to get involved, the goal is to inspire teens to consider “big questions” about the world around them and their place in it, affecting how they view themselves as thinkers and creators.

The Great Stories Club establishes important connections between underserved youth, their library, and their local library staff, as well as local nonprofit partners that have proven to be important to success after incarceration, treatment, graduation, or during other transitions.

Ultimately, the Great Stories Club aims to improve literacy while inspiring youth to be better prepared to lead positive, successful lives.
HISTORY

From 2006 to 2012, the ALA Public Programs Office made more than 1,000 programming grants to libraries with funding from Oprah’s Angel Network. Five theme-based programs were offered:

- “Facing Challenges”
- “Choices”
- “Breaking Boundaries”
- “New Horizons”
- “Second Chances”

In 2015, ALA received a $350,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) to support three new rounds of Great Stories Club grants for libraries. Offered in 2015, 2016, and 2017, these NEH-supported programs reached more than 8,000 young adults. Themes for these rounds included:

- “Hack the Feed: Media, Resistance, Revolution”
- “The Art of Change: Creation, Growth and Transformation”
- “Structures of Suffering: Origins of Teen Violence and Suicide”

With funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation in 2017, ALA developed new themes that explore Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation:

- “Deeper Than Our Skins: The Present Is a Conversation with the Past”
- “Finding Your Voice: Speaking Truth to Power”
- “Growing Up Brave on the Margins: Courage and Coming of Age”

These new themes connect ALA’s longstanding Great Stories Club model to the W.K. Kellogg Foundation’s Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation (TRHT) efforts. Launched by the Kellogg Foundation in 2016, TRHT is a comprehensive, national, and community-based process to plan for and bring about transformational and sustainable change, and to address the historic and contemporary effects of racism.

In 2018 and 2019, ALA began offering three additional NEH-funded themes of the Great Stories Club:

- “Empathy: The Cost of Switching Sides”
- “What Makes a Hero?: Self, Society, and Rising to the Occasion”
- “Growing Up Brave on the Margins: Courage and Coming of Age”

Since 2006, ALA’s Great Stories Club has reached more than 800 libraries and 30,000 young adults.
HERE’S HOW IT WORKS

OPTION 1  Host a Great Stories Club with a grant from the American Library Association

1 | Find a Partner and Apply for a Grant. Participating library workers come from all across the country, from libraries large and small, urban and rural, well-funded and under-resourced. To receive a Great Stories Club grant from ALA, libraries must work in partnership with, or be located within, an organization that reaches underserved youth, such as an alternative school, juvenile detention center, or teen parenting program. Check the website (ala.org/greatstories) for upcoming application timelines and instructions.

2 | Attend Training in Chicago. All grant recipients receive specialized training at a two-day workshop in Chicago, where you will connect with other grantees and learn best practices for engaging teens with the ideas explored in the books. Travel and accommodation expenses are covered by the grant.

3 | Receive Your Books and Download Resources. Grantee benefits include 11 paperback copies of up to four books on the reading list and a programming grant of up to $1,200. You will also have access to professionally designed, customizable, and downloadable resources, including discussion questions, bookmarks, related reading lists, certificates of completion, and promotional posters and flyers.

4 | Launch Book Club for Teens. Work with your partner organization to launch your book club. Your library or partner organization may have a group of teens ready to participate; if not, you will need to recruit participants. You are welcome to use the promotional materials available on the website (ala.org/greatstories/resources) to promote your book club. Clubs often meet once a month to discuss one book, but how you administer the club is up to you and your partner organization.

5 | Help Teens Develop Literacy and Empathy. At the end of the club, teens keep their books as part of — or to start — their own personal libraries. Library workers often distribute surveys to teens for feedback and use that information to gauge teens’ personal growth and seek advice for how to better administer clubs in the future. Librarians then prepare and submit a final report to ALA.
OPTION 2  Host a Great Stories Club on your own

1. **Find a Partner.** Even if you’re not doing the Great Stories Club with an “official” ALA grant, we still recommend that libraries partner with an organization that reaches underserved youth, such as an alternative school, juvenile detention center, or teen parenting program. If your library is part of one of those institutions (e.g., an alternative high school library) then there is no need to find an external partner — you can skip to step 2.

2. **Select Your Theme.** ALA offers a number of Great Stories Club themes, each with its own book list and resources; they include “Finding Your Voice: Speaking Truth to Power”; “What Makes a Hero: Self, Society, and Rising to the Occasion”; and “Hack the Feed: Media, Resistance, Revolution.” You can learn more about the available themes in the coming pages and on the website (ala.org/greatstories). Working with your partner organization, select a theme. Make sure you’re comfortable with the book list.

3. **Gather Copies of the Books.** Gather 8 to 10 copies of each of the books you plan to read with your group. You may wish to seek funding to purchase the copies, which will allow you to gift the books to your participants after the program; your state humanities council is one place to approach, since the Great Stories Club uses content funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. Or, use inter-library loan to collect enough copies.

4. **Launch Book Club for Teens.** Work with your partner organization to launch your book club. Your library or partner organization may have a group of teens ready to participate; if not, you will need to recruit participants. You are welcome to use the promotional materials available on the website (ala.org/greatstories/resources) to promote your book club. Clubs often meet once a month to discuss one book, but how you administer the club is up to you and your partner organization. Review other online resources and webinars to get ideas for supplemental programs.

5. **Help Teens Develop Literacy and Empathy.** If possible, allow teens keep their books as part of — or to start — their own personal libraries. Library workers often distribute surveys to teens for feedback and use that information to gauge teens’ personal growth and as advice for how to better administer clubs in the future.

We recommend that libraries partner with an organization that reaches underserved youth.
SAMPLE RACIAL HEALING CIRCLE PROMPTS

The following sample prompts may be used to facilitate racial healing circles as part of your library's consideration of each title on the reading list by Mike Wenger (senior consultant, W.K. Kellogg Foundation; adjunct faculty, Community and Equity), and Mee Moua (senior consultant, W.K. Kellogg Foundation; principal, Interdependent Group, LLC).

Sample Prompts for *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates

1. Ta-Nehisi talks a lot about The Mecca (Howard University). For him, it was a place of affirmation, a place where he felt that he truly belonged; a place where he could be his true self. Share a story about a place that once or still does serve as your Mecca. Why is this place important to you? And how did/does it make you feel?

2. Living without fear is another important theme in the book. Ta-Nehisi talks about the experiences in life that he may not have fully enjoyed and internalized because "one-third" of his brain was pre-occupied with fear. Share a story about a time in your life that you faced fear and overcame it. What's one life lesson that the experience taught you?

3. Ta-Nehisi also talks about the concept of "being free." He uses Malcolm X as an example, stating that Malcolm "spoke as though his body were his own." Share a story about a time when you truly felt "free" (whatever the word means to you). Or, if you've never had this experience, describe in detail what it would look like/feel like for you to feel "free."

SAMPLE RACIAL HEALING CIRCLE PROMPTS: DEEPER THAN OUR SKIN

The present is a conversation with the past. The following sample prompts may be used to facilitate racial healing circles as part of your library's consideration of each title on the reading list by Mike Wenger (senior consultant, W.K. Kellogg Foundation; adjunct faculty, Community and Equity), and Mee Moua (senior consultant, W.K. Kellogg Foundation; principal, Interdependent Group, LLC).

Sample Prompts for *The Poet X* by Elizabeth Acevedo

1. "The old adage goes "children should be seen and not heard,"" implies that speaking up and out matters for children and young people does not belong in adult conversation. The truth is that young people have been vital to making change by speaking up and out. Take Joan of Arc, for example. In 1429, while just 18 years old, she led a French army to the besieged city of Orléans in a victory over the English. But we don't have to go back to 15th-century France to find young heroes. On November 14, 1960, 6-year-old Ruby Bridges became the first African American child to integrate a white Southern elementary school. Her mother and U.S. marshals had to escort young Ruby to class because of violent mobs in her hometown of New Orleans. Bridges was born the same year that Brown v. Board of Education made "separate but equal" public spaces illegal, and her bravery was a milestone in the Civil Rights movement. There are countless examples of young people speaking out and taking a stand against injustice. And now is the time for young people to be heard.

2. "When I was a child, I used to dream the world would end,"" ""or internalized because "one-third" of his brain was pre-occupied with fear. Share a story about a time in your life that you faced fear and overcame it. What's one life lesson that the experience taught you?""
These eight Great Stories Club themes have been developed by librarians and humanities scholars to resonate with young readers facing personal challenges like detention, incarceration, addiction, academic probation, poverty, and homelessness.

Each theme offers programming resources for use in reading and discussion programs, including customizable promotional materials, reading lists, discussion questions, and essays. These resources are freely available at ala.org/greatstories.

Libraries that receive Great Stories Club grants get paperback copies of the selected theme-related books to use in reading and discussion groups, as well as programming support materials and online or in-person training. Training includes an exploration of the humanities content of the book collection, programming tips and ideas, and expert and peer support.
THEME

DEEPER THAN OUR SKINS

The Present Is a Conversation with the Past

“The past isn’t dead and buried. In fact, it isn’t even past.” As a candidate for president for the United States in 2008, then-Senator Barack Obama used these words to argue that we can only ever truly understand — and begin to overcome — the bitterness of modern race relations in the light of brave and accurate accounting of history. Obama’s line is a slightly altered version of a quote from Southern author William Faulkner; in other words, he turned to literature as a source of wisdom about the difficult subject of race in America and built upon what he found there to imagine new pathways toward justice, healing, and unity.

The “Deeper Than Our Skins” theme is grounded in literature that can help us look beneath the surface of racism in America to reveal how the past is alive in the present. This theme uses powerful stories of oppression, resistance, suffering, and triumph to identify the roots of racialized experience in the United States, and to inspire discussions around how to construct more equitable futures for the people in our nation and world.

Through fiction, nonfiction, comics, poetry, short stories, and art, the books in “Deeper Than Our Skins” uncover the often-hidden histories of America’s Native, enslaved, and immigrant communities. Each one offers points of connection that reach across time and cultures to affirm our shared humanity, while recognizing the importance of remembering and recounting unique origins and narratives. Meant to be read and discussed in various combinations, the works in this theme empower young people to use knowledge of the past to explore their own intersectional identities, empathize with others, and identify how they can be agents of racial healing and change.

— Maria Sachiko Cecire, Associate Professor of Literature and Director of the Center for Experimental Humanities, Bard College, who created the theme in collaboration with Wini Ashooh, Central Rappahannock Regional Library System; Edith Campbell, Cunningham Memorial Library at Indiana State University; and Vanessa “Chacha” Centeno, Sacramento Public Library
Reading List

- Between the World and Me by Ta-Nehisi Coates
- The Revolution of Evelyn Serrano by Sonia Manzano
- Dreaming in Indian: Contemporary Native American Voices, edited by Lisa Charleyboy and Mary Beth Leatherdale
- The Shadow Hero by Gene Luen Yang, illustrated by Sonny Liew
- Mother of the Sea by Zetta Elliott
- Always Running: La Vida Loca: Gang Days in L.A. by Luis J. Rodriguez

Sample Discussion Questions

1. Is there a scene in this book that describes a racially-motivated incident, policy, or set of social norms that reminds you of a similar racial reality today? Do you think race relations are getting better over time in this country or just changing without much improvement?
2. In every time and situation, there are many diverse roles for people to play in the struggle for racial justice and/or healing. Identify three or more different approaches to working toward positive change in this book. Who does what kind of work?
3. How do gender, age, economic situation, physical ability, personality, and other considerations influence the roles that people take on?

TRUTH, RACIAL HEALING & TRANSFORMATION

This theme connects the Great Stories Club literary programming model to the W.K. Kellogg Foundation’s Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation efforts. The project engages local communities in racial healing and change efforts that address present inequities linked to historic and contemporary beliefs in racial hierarchy.

Learn more at healourcommunities.org.
The old adage goes, “Children should be seen and not heard.” That conventional wisdom implies that speaking up and out is the exclusive realm of adults. It also suggests that children and young people don’t have important things to say — that they should stay out of adult conversation.

The truth is that young people have been vital to making change by speaking and showing up in the face of adversity. Take Joan of Arc, for example. In 1429, while just 18 years old, she led a French army to the besieged city of Orléans in a victory over the English. But we don’t have to go back to 15th-century France to find young heroes. On November 14, 1960, 6-year-old Ruby Bridges became the first African American child to integrate a white Southern elementary school. Speaking truth to power is never easy. Joan of Arc was burned at the stake. Ruby Bridges endured daily threats of violence for one year as she single-handedly integrated her elementary school.

“Finding Your Voice” includes texts that highlight the necessity and power of young people speaking up despite challenges, social pressure, and even the threat of bigger dangers. There are many ways to find your voice; however, the books in this theme focus on a few key ways young people speak truth to power. First, they emphasize the significance of one’s individual voice, no matter how seemingly small or powerless that voice is. Secondly, the texts emphasize standing up for oneself; this could mean standing up to a sexist bully, calling out an adult who misjudges you, or speaking out against racial profiling. Finally, these novels illustrate young people empowering others to use their voices through writing, art, and community organizing to advocate for institutional change and social justice.

—Susana M. Morris, Associate Professor of Literature, Media, and Communication at the Georgia Institute of Technology, who created the theme in collaboration with Angelina M. Cortes, Sno-Isle Libraries; Joslyn Bowling Dixon, Prince William Library System; and Amira Shabana, Proviso East High School
Reading List

- *The Poet X* by Elizabeth Acevedo
- *I Am Alfonso Jones* by Tony Medina
- *Gabi, A Girl in Pieces* by Isabel Quintero
- *Piecing Me Together* by Renée Watson
- *American Street* by Ibi Zoboi
- *Anger is a Gift* by Mark Oshiro

Sample Discussion Questions

1. Find a moment when a character in this book looks to the past in order to find a way to move forward. How does understanding the history of one’s family, community, or racial/ethnic group help this character make powerful choices about how to shape the future?

2. Zines are self-published short magazines that anyone can make. Sometimes zines deal with controversial topics and are made for small audiences. In *Gabi, A Girl in Pieces*, Gabi creates a zine about women's bodies in school. What is controversial about Gabi’s zine? If you made a zine, what would you focus on? What would it include? Who would you give it to?

3. Collage is an art form that brings together different elements to create something new. In *Piecing Me Together*, how does Jade use collage as a creative outlet and as a way to express herself? How does visual art compare to speaking one's mind?

TRUTH, RACIAL HEALING & TRANSFORMATION

This theme connects the Great Stories Club literary programming model to the W.K. Kellogg Foundation’s Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation efforts. The project engages local communities in racial healing and change efforts that address present inequities linked to historic and contemporary beliefs in racial hierarchy.

Learn more at healourcommunities.org.
EMPATHY

The Cost of Switching Sides

Empathy has been held up as a balm for our divided society by everyone from neuroscientists to primatologists to political thinkers. Yet as the consensus grows that we need to cultivate more empathy, the scarcer it seems to become. From political debates, to cultural choices, to classroom conversations, we seem increasingly unable to engage in empathetic exchange. Instead, we pick sides and dig in against perceived enemies.

Recent studies have made the case that literature is perhaps our greatest resource for developing empathy; as authors push us to inhabit the lives of their characters, we find ourselves a little less likely to retreat behind the walls of our own moral certainty. The books chosen for this theme complicate that equation: each text encourages readers to explore the power of empathy, but also helps us understand why empathy can be so hard to come by. Understanding another person’s perspective means enduring the loss of the righteousness that accompanies a fight against a clearly defined enemy.

Finally, all of these readings explore the mechanisms for developing empathy for oneself when faced with a world that refuses connection. To hold on to a sense of one’s own humanity when there is little evidence anyone else sees you as fully human is a profound act: a turn toward vulnerability that is a prerequisite for empathizing with the pain of others. As reading groups explore these texts, they will be asking some of the most pressing questions of our time: How can we find our own identity in connection with others, instead of in opposition to them? How can we move through the world in a way that lessens conflict rather than thrives upon it? What does it take to truly empathize with another person?

—Anna Mae Duane, Associate Professor of English at the University of Connecticut, who created this theme with Allyson Dowds, Boston Public Library
Reading List

- *Flight* by Sherman Alexie
- *Kindred: A Graphic Novel Adaptation* by Octavia Butler, Damian Duffy, and John Jennings
- *All American Boys* by Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely
- *Stuck in Neutral* by Terry Trueman
- *March: Book Three* by John Lewis, Andrew Aydin, and Nate Powell
- Bonus book: *Pipestone: My Life in an Indian Boarding School* by Adam Fortunate Eagle

Sample Discussion Questions

1. Put yourself in the body of someone who owes you justice, past or present. Write or perform a brief paragraph from inside their head. Why do they do what they do? How do they feel about it?
2. In *Stuck in Neutral*, does the father consider himself a villain? How does he feel about himself? How does he feel (or think he feels) about Shawn? Do you agree with him?
3. Often time travel novels revolve around the need to somehow save the present. (Think about *The Terminator, Days of Future Past*, etc.) Do you think that’s possible in *Kindred*? Why or why not?
WHAT MAKES A HERO?
Self, Society, and Rising to the Occasion

Legends, literature, media, and history are full of stories about heroes who rise to the occasion in moments of need, taking on great risk for the good of others. What makes a person able to perform heroic acts? Is this something that certain people are just born with, or does it grow out of our circumstances and upbringing? Related to this is the essential question of how much control we actually have over our own self-making. Major thinkers have debated these questions for centuries, and individuals continue to grapple with them as they face down the challenges — sometimes seemingly small, other times impossibly large — of everyday life.

The books in this theme each take a different view of what it means to be a hero, considering how the combination of unique social circumstances, compassion for others, and inner resources can make it possible for young people to perform acts that they may not have imagined themselves capable of achieving. At the same time, these texts explore the conditions that create the need for heroism, probing the underlying social problems that can lead to oppression, discrimination, and even genocide. Rather than serving as a simple celebration of heroism, each book acknowledges the psychological pressures of taking on the responsibilities of a “hero,” and considers the costs and benefits of both individual and collective action.

Each of the books in this theme offers different models of heroism, giving examples of characters that learn to recognize the conditions that shape their societies, determine their own moral standards within these structures, comprehend and empathize with the needs of others, and find the courage to act in moments of danger. From quiet resistance to all-out battle; from compromise with the “enemy” to the simple act of survival: these books use history, fantasy, and imagination to depict how young people can take part in their own self-making and forge new definitions of heroism for their own situations and times.

—Maria Sachiko Cecire, Associate Professor of Literature and Director of the Center for Experimental Humanities, Bard College, who developed the theme in collaboration with Jennifer Mann, Teen Librarian at the Ypsilanti District Library.
Reading List

- *Black Panther: A Nation Under Our Feet, Book 1* by Ta-Nehisi Coates and Brian Stelfreeze
- *Maus II: A Survivor’s Tale: And Here My Troubles Began* by Art Spiegelman
- *Binti* by Nnedi Okorafor
- *Code Talker: A Novel About the Navajo Marines of World War Two* by Joseph Bruchac
- *What Can’t Wait* by Ashley Hope Pérez
- *Buck: A Memoir* by MK Asante

Sample Discussion Questions

1. Would you call the protagonist of this book a “hero”? Why or why not? Answering this question may require defining what you think it means to be heroic in the specific context of the novel. Does heroism in this case require being flexible or firm about the character’s previous beliefs (or some combination)?

2. Who or what is the enemy in this novel, if there is one? How do you know? Does the book give you any reasons to sympathize with the antagonist(s) that oppose the main character? If so, find specific moments in the book to discuss. How does the protagonist understand how the “other side” came to have the beliefs and positions that they hold? Does this affect the outcome of the story?

3. In *Black Panther*, both Tetu and T’Challa’s father tried studying philosophy, but both eventually gave up when faced with the realities of corruption and war. Do you think that thinking more about the “big questions” can help Wakanda find freedom and a peaceful resolution to its conflicts? If not, what can?
**THEME**

**GROWING UP BRAVE ON THE MARGINS**

*Courage and Coming of Age*

Growing from a child to a teenager to a young adult usually involves a number of rites of passage: bar and bat mitzvahs, sweet sixteen parties, quinceñeras, getting a driver’s license, attending prom, and graduating from high school. However, many formative moments for young people happen in more informal settings, and the truth is that young people are not navigating these public and private moments in a vacuum. Indeed, young people are sometimes figuring out their morals, values, and increasing independence while living in societies that do not always value their newfound voices.

This circumstance is drawn into particularly sharp relief for young people in historically marginalized groups. Not only do they have to figure out all the “normal” stuff that comes with growing up, they have to do so with the added burden of negative social pressure. Under these extra societal pressures, young people are forced to perform a type of high-wire act requiring more than the usual intelligence or even pluckiness; this requires courage, bravery, and sometimes even heroism. How do marginalized young people — those who exist on the fringes of mainstream society because of their religion, gender, race, sexuality, ability, or class — find the courage to not only be themselves, but assert their very right to exist?

The books in this theme feature strong protagonists who rise to challenges and fight for justice in their communities in the face of parents who may not always understand them, peers who doubt them, and communities who dismiss them or even find them dangerous. First, they emphasize the role of discovering one’s own power. Second, they emphasize speaking truth to power. Third, they emphasize fighting the powers that be, often by banding together with other scared, but brave, folks who are not only willing to fight for themselves but for the good of the greater society.

—**Susana M. Morris,** Associate Professor of Literature, Media, and Communication at the Georgia Institute of Technology, who created the theme in collaboration with **Anna Cvtkovic,** Teen Librarian at the San Francisco Public Library

**Free Resources**

[ala.org/greatstories/resources](ala.org/greatstories/resources)

- Discussion questions
- Related reading list
- Certificate of achievement
- Poster
- Bookmarks
Reading List

- Ms. Marvel Volume 1: No Normal by G. Willow Wilson and Adrian Alphona
- The Hate U Give by Angie Thomas
- March: Book One by John Lewis, Andrew Aydin, Nate Powell
- Shadowshaper by Daniel José Older
- X: A Novel by Ilyashah Shabazz and Kekla Magoon
- The Sun Is Also a Star by Nicola Yoon

Sample Discussion Questions

1. Comic books and graphic novels are often known for their vibrant colors and powerful action scenes with superheroes. However, March is painted in black and white and is an autobiography that does not necessarily include those typical elements. How is March similar to other graphic novels or comic books you’ve encountered?

2. Community protests in the wake of unpopular legal verdicts are a big part of history, from the Watts protests in the 1960s, to the protest after the Rodney King verdict in 1992, to the more recent protests after the death of Mike Brown in 2015 in Ferguson, Missouri. In The Hate U Give, Starr’s neighborhood erupts into disbelief, frustration, and rage after the grand jury’s decision for Khalil’s murder. How and why does the neighborhood react to the grand jury’s decision?

3. Assimilation, or the process of adapting or adjusting to the culture of a group, is often a major part of the immigrant experience. Compare and contrast how the characters in Ms. Marvel all deal with the need to fit in and with the rules and restrictions of the world around them. How does gender factor in to their experience of assimilation?
As long as there have been new communications technologies, people have worried about how media can control our thinking and even alter the nature of how we experience being human. Today some researchers and journalists warn that our Internet culture may be making us less thoughtful, lonelier people, even as governments push for greater technological literacy and universal connectivity.

The three books in this theme focus on the stories of young people who learn to see the structures of power that underlie the mass entertainment and information industries in their worlds, and who use this knowledge to resist unjust and oppressive systems. At the same time, the books raise essential questions about where our thoughts, ideas, and very sense of self come from. How much are our identities molded by outside interests? How can we become aware of our media environment when we are immersed in it? How can we use media to improve our circumstances and those of others?

Current thinkers like Henry Jenkins argue that mobile Internet technologies have ushered in an age of participatory culture in which most people are potential media producers and consumers, with immense reserves of information at their fingertips. But when individual “knowledge” includes not only the contents of our brains but also the contents of the Internet that we always carry with us, are we almost cyborgs already? If the media technologies we use have become essential to who we are, shouldn’t we care passionately about who controls their production, management, and content? Each novel in this theme is a powerful work in its own right, but taken together they illuminate how media awareness can change lives and help us challenge injustice.

— Maria Sachiko Cecire, Associate Professor of Literature and Director of the Center for Experimental Humanities, Bard College
Reading List

- *FEED* by MT Anderson
- *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins
- *March: Book One* by John Lewis, Andrew Aydin, and Nate Powell

Sample Discussion Questions

1. In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss learns to live a life constantly in the public eye: performing versions of herself based on how she thinks an outside audience will perceive her. During the process of spinning a love story for her and Peeta’s survival, she becomes confused about her actual feelings toward her friend. Do you think that the way we act for others (both in real life and online) can influence who we actually are?

2. A number of recent student and youth-led resistance movements (especially in the Arab world) have used social media in their attempts to overthrow oppressive regimes, with mixed results. In some cases, governments have shut down sites like YouTube and Twitter to limit communication, and in others they have turned off the Internet altogether. In *March*, what political and social conditions made it possible for John Lewis and his fellow activists to use nonviolent sit-ins to create change?

3. *FEED* is a novel, but Anderson includes snippets of advertisements, news, entertainment, and imagery from the feed to convey the experience of being hooked into it. How do these sections affect the way you understand the world of the novel? How alike or different does it seem from the way that we receive information through media?
THE ART OF CHANGE
Creation, Growth, and Transformation

Change may be chosen or involuntary, accepted or resisted, and is one of the foundational issues of both our temporal human existence and literature. In Buck, The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian, and The Complete Persepolis, the arts and humanities provide “a place to stand” for the young narrators as they transform their lives in response to personal and societal forces.

While all three texts in this theme chronicle changes in the narrators’ inner and individual lives, they all may be thought of as “witness memoirs” that address issues of racism, poverty, intolerance, and war. These texts all raise questions about whether or not one needs to leave one’s social environment in order to change, as all of the protagonists do at some point.

These transformations invite readers to explore key questions: How does one work to achieve an understanding of the self through reading and creative production? What role do the arts play in navigating the tensions between social and individual changes? All three of these young protagonists are able to use the arts and humanities — including drawing, writing, and literature — to help themselves find meaning and establish order when faced with personal and social chaos. Engagement with the arts, whether in a prison cell, a poverty-stricken reservation, a society torn apart by war, or in the inner-city streets, becomes the catalyst for the narrators of these works to redefine their relationships with themselves and their societies, and to making life worth living rather than merely surviving day to day. While each memoir is a powerful story of a particular life, collectively they can help us think about how we can positively negotiate the inevitable changes that come with being alive.

— Laura Rogers, Director of the Writing Center and Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities, Albany College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences

Free Resources
ala.org/greatstories/resources

Discussion questions
Related reading list
Certificate of achievement
Poster
Bookmarks
Reading List

- *Buck: A Memoir* by MK Asante
- *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian* by Sherman Alexie
- *The Complete Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi

Sample Discussion Questions

1. MK Asante incorporates lyrics from contemporary hip hop and rap artists, his own writing, and quotes from well-known authors as part of his memoir. Choose one that stands out to you. How does this lyric/quote help you understand the changes that Asante was going through at that point in his story? Do you have a favorite quote or lyric that has helped you through some difficult changes?

2. In *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, Arnold describes himself as a “part-time” Indian and his story as “absolutely true.” What changes in his life does Sherman Alexie emphasize by the choice of these words for the title? Do you consider any aspect of yourself to be “part-time”? Why does he emphasize that the book is “absolutely true”? Is anything ever “absolutely true”?

3. Did you have preconceived ideas about Iran and its people? Did reading *Persepolis* change those ideas? If so, what part(s) of the book impacted your perspective, or caused you to change your thinking about Iran and the Iranian people?
STRUC TURES OF SUFFERING
Origins of Teen Violence and Suicide

The sexualized cyberbullying of teen girls, gun violence among young gang members, LGBTQ suicides, young people’s shrinking job prospects: recent conversations about topics like these have rekindled longstanding concerns about the state of teenagers today and the standards to which society holds them. The three books in this theme follow the stories of individual youth to explore some of the underlying systems, norms, and emotions that can lead to teens hurting themselves and others. In each case, the protagonists’ feelings and choices are shaped by the actions of others in their social circles and other factors outside their control. Using humor, introspection, and drama, these works ask: How is it that communities and interpersonal relationships are both essential to human self-knowledge, happiness, and ability to function, and can also cause such anxiety, danger, and even self-harm?

In 2015, 3,060 Americans between the ages of 12 and 20 committed suicide, making it the second leading cause of death for this age group. Suicidal thoughts affect many more youth: according to a national survey from 2015, 17.7% of high school students reported having them in the past year. Young people involved in bullying — on both sides — are more likely to engage in suicidal behavior than those who are not, and about 20% of youth experience mental illnesses like substance abuse, depression, anxiety, and behavioral disorders, which may also contribute to tendencies toward self-harm.

The three books in this theme each face teen suicide head-on, delving into the inner lives of young people under enormous pressure and exploring the social contexts that lead to feelings of isolation and hopelessness. In their conclusions, all three works suggest ways of breaking the cycles of violence and disrupting the structures of suffering that can trap teens. They point toward hopeful visions of how we as individuals can contribute to building accepting communities and creating supportive social bonds.

— Laura Bates, Professor of English at Indiana State University; Maria Sachiko Cecire, Associate Professor of Literature and Director of the Center for Experimental Humanities, Bard College; Allison McKim, Associate Professor of Sociology, Bard College
Reading List

- *Thirteen Reasons Why* by Jay Asher
- *It's Kind of a Funny Story* by Ned Vizzini
- *Romeo and Juliet* (No Fear Shakespeare Graphic Novels), illustrated by Matt Weigle

Sample Discussion Questions

1. How can being part of a social group both help people find support and happiness and also serve as a threat to individuality and ethical behavior? In *Thirteen Reasons Why*, what action does Clay take at the end of the novel to try to use his social abilities for good, instead of as part of a destructive system? What could you do?

2. In *It's Kind of a Funny Story*, Craig seems to go back and forth between blaming his eating disorder and depression on “chemistry” — the chemical balance in his brain and body — and the circumstances of his life. What do you think is the relationship between these two things? Why do you think so many young people are being prescribed brain chemistry-altering medications for depression, anxiety, and other mental health disorders?

3. In *Romeo and Juliet*, even the Friar says that “this desperate situation requires desperate action,” and Juliet pulls out a dagger that she is carrying and threatens to kill herself. Is this further evidence that the societal and adult influences around them contribute to acts of violence? Whereas Romeo resorts to violence against others, Juliet is prepared to commit violence upon herself. Does this suggest that there may be a gender influence in teen violence and suicide?
Library workers of all stripes are welcome to be part of ALA’s Great Stories Club. They come from public libraries, college and university libraries, and K–12 school libraries; they live in big cities, rural farming communities, and everything in between. Some have experience working with underserved youth, while for others, this work is brand new.

In this section, we take a closer look at a few of the library workers who have participated. They offer their experiences, challenges, and successes to show the many ways this club can work.
Sometimes, a book can be the way to connect to the person you need most.

That’s what Kristy Gale found while doing the Great Stories Club with Seattle Public School’s Interagency Academy Alternative High School. As a young adult services librarian in the Seattle Public Library, she was used to working with young adults in the area who did not have permanent housing.

When a friend told her about the Great Stories Club, Kristy thought it was such a great model that she used ALA’s resources, available online, to start the book club with the high school before applying for the grant. Since then, she has applied for and received the grant every year, and even keeps a blog about her experiences.

Though students always enjoy the books and are engaged with what she has to say — “They listen, and they’re not looking at their phones,” she said — it can sometimes be difficult to get them to join in a discussion.

“I’ve seen some amazing growth within the students that I’ve worked with, as well as within myself.”

—Kristy Gale, Seattle Public Library

Kristy Gale (bottom middle), Seattle Public Library, Washington
That's why she brings in presenters for each book, like a local comic book artist or a colleague who participated in the civil rights movement.

When Kristy brought in a juvenile justice case manager for a book discussion, she saw an incredible breakthrough. After the case manager spoke about her experiences working with young women of color, one student spoke up. This girl had sat through previous discussions with her arms crossed and had never participated, but as she listened to the case manager, she began to cry and felt compelled to tell her story.

“The presenter made her feel safe, was somebody she could relate to,” Kristy said. “They made an important connection.”

Kristy also used the Great Stories Club as an opportunity to take the students on a field trip to their local public library branch. Many didn’t know there was a branch so close to their school, and others did not have a library card or had too many fines on their accounts. Removing those barriers helped students have easier access to books, she said.

For Kristy, the payoff for all her work comes when she reads the students’ post-program survey answers. They have made comments like “People's views (in book club) have helped get me a much stronger understanding of what different groups go through,” and “Now I know people can come together and make a change.”

“I’ve seen some amazing growth within the students that I’ve worked with,” Kristy said, “as well as within myself.”
One of the best parts of the Great Stories Club is getting the whole community involved.

That’s what Deborah Will found in Zion Township, Illinois. As instructional media center coordinator for the Zion-Benton Township High School, she worked with the township supervisor’s office to create a unique Great Stories Club: one that involved a group of 14- to 16-year-olds who were employed in the township’s summer work program.

With the support of the township administration, reading the club’s books became part of the students’ work day. Soon enough, some of the township employees began reading the books, too. Discussions began naturally.

“People started chatting about books as they were out working, out doing gardening,” Deborah said.

But when it came time to read The Hate U Give, a novel about a teen girl who witnesses the shooting of a black boy by a white police officer, the township leadership became nervous.

“But I told them that these students were living this experience, and the book gives them an avenue to discuss these feelings without having to discuss particulars of their own lives.”

The township got on board, and as the students read the book, so did the mayor, a council member, and the chief of police. Many came to the book club for the discussion and were impressed with the students’ thoughts and ideas that stemmed from the book.

“The program opened many new doors for me that changed who I am today.”

— Elizabeth Rodriguez, student

Deborah Will, Instructional Media Center Coordinator, Zion-Benton Township High School, Illinois
starting a movie club. He took all 450 students in the freshman class to see the movie and personally paid for any student who could not afford the trip.

“They all realized the kids were mature enough for all of this,” Deborah said. “Instead of walking away from what students experience, they walked toward it, met them in the middle, and said, ‘Let’s figure out how to make it a better tomorrow.’”

Though the book club took a lot of effort for Deborah over the summer, it has been paid back to her over and over during the school year, with students regularly seeking her out to chat or ask for book advice. One student, whom others had written off as a non-reader who was unlikely to succeed, came to the library and asked Deborah for a new book to read, since he liked *The Hate U Give* so much. She gave him two options.

“He said, ‘You get me,’” she said. “That’s payment. That’s everything.”
HELPING STUDENTS FIND THEIR VOICES

Growing up in Chicago’s Little Village neighborhood, Annette Alvarado was no stranger to issues around gang violence and immigration.

Now, as a reference and instruction librarian at Loyola University Chicago’s Arrupe College — which offers associate degrees specifically designed for low-income students who may need extra academic support — she acts as a mentor for students who come from similar neighborhoods.

“I really enjoy working with these students,” she said. “They remind me of my friends I grew up with, and I want to help give them the right opportunities.”

Annette is new to the Great Stories Club. When she read about the grants, she thought it would be a great way to get this up-and-coming group of young men and women to use books as a catalyst for discussions around their experiences.
“I thought it would be great to help them find their voices,” she said. “Even though these are fictional stories, these things happen in real life, too. A lot of students have dealt with trauma. They have persevered, but it is still important to talk about what happened.”

As she starts the club this year, she hopes to tap into the college’s graphic novel club to recruit potential members. She has already begun advertising and has found that when students learn they can keep the books, they get excited.

Recently, Annette also received training to become a racial healing facilitator so she could learn to uncover and confront unconscious beliefs around racism through a discussion methodology championed by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

“Growing up in a Latino community, there are issues around racism that we did not talk about. I want to learn how to facilitate a safe space.”

— Annette Alvarado, Loyola University Chicago

**GSC PRO TIP**

Bring food. Even just a snack gives teens energy, motivates them to participate, and helps open up the discussion.

Librarians attend a TRHT training in Chicago on how to lead racial healing circles.
RELATING TO STORIES, OLD AND NEW

Getting teenagers to read classics can be difficult.

But when Jennifer Hatcher, a librarian in the Cumberland County Public Library and Information Center in Fayetteville, North Carolina, had her alternative high school students read Romeo and Juliet as part of the “Structures of Suffering: Origins of Teen Violence and Suicide” theme, they began to understand how the star-crossed lovers’ story related to their own lives.

“We talked about young love and losing someone you love to suicide,” Jennifer said. “And we talked about gang mentality and getting caught up in that.”
But the stories that the students most related to, like *Buck*, a memoir by MK Asante about growing up as an African American in Philadelphia, had immediate impact.

“They devoured it,” Jennifer said.

And when MK Asante himself came and spoke to Ramsey Street Alternative High School during the Great Stories Club book tour, the students were enthralled with the idea that someone like them — someone who got in trouble in high school — could be so successful.

“He was young, and a rapper — he was someone they admired,” Jennifer said. “They asked him how to react differently when somebody is mistreating you, and you want to fight them, and you know you’re going to get in trouble. The students really related to him.”

That kind of impact was what fueled Kohnee Harmon, an emerging adult services specialist in the library, to take over the grant last year and continue with the Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation theme, “Finding Your Voice.” Harmon held a racial healing circle, where the students shared their experiences with racism. The circles are a safe place for participants to share their stories — from growing up in foster care to dealing with violence or the deaths of loved ones — and hone their deep listening skills in a safe environment.

It’s experiences like these — talking about books and sharing stories in safe space — that allow students to better cope with emotions they deal with in their own lives.

“It enables students to talk about things that are difficult without having to be vulnerable,” Jennifer said. She recently ran into a student who had gone through the book club’s “Structures of Suffering” theme. He was using some of concepts they talked about to figure out how to process his own emotions in a healthy way.

“He was learning how to manage his anger, and he was determined not to get in trouble anymore,” she said. “That was really great. I actually got to see how it affected his life.”

“It enables students to talk about things that are difficult without having to be vulnerable.”

— Jennifer Hatcher, Cumberland County Public Library

GSC PRO TIP
If discussion has completely stalled, or if students haven’t read the book, try reading a passage or chapter out loud and discussing just that section.

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Jennifer Hatcher (left) and Kohnee Harmon, Cumberland County Public Library, North Carolina

Jennifer Hatcher (left) and Kohnee Harmon, Cumberland County Public Library, North Carolina
TALKING ABOUT SUICIDE THROUGH STORIES

In 2016, library professional Angela Hartman knew that her students needed help beyond what she and her colleagues were providing.

Over the previous two years, several students in the Hutto Independent School District in Hutto, Texas, had died by suicide, and everyone was looking for ways to prevent more teens from taking their own lives.

“I wanted to see if there was something I could do,” said Angela, who is a librarian for secondary campuses in the district. “I wanted to know how to talk to the kids about this.”

So she applied for and received the Great Stories Club grant with the theme of “Structures of Suffering: Origins of Teen Violence and Suicide.” She partnered with the Sandbox at Madeleine’s Place.

“The more books they see, the more books that are available for them, the more they will read.”

— Angela Hartman, Hutto Independent School District
a nonprofit started by the mother of a teen suicide victim that provides programming for local teens.

The mother met with the book club at the high school, and discussions often veered from the books they read to problems they dealt with in real life. “Kids talked about whether they had considered suicide, or talked about a friend who had taken their own life,” she said.

Though the experience was successful, for the next round, Angela partnered with an alternative high school in the district and focused on the “Empathy: The Cost of Switching Sides” theme. With this new partnership, students were able to get school credit for participating in the book club. Nearly a dozen students participated, and many were thrilled that they got to keep the books they read for their own personal library.

“They said, ‘Personal library?’” Angela laughed. “But I told them it doesn’t have to be a wall of books. It can just be this book.”

Angela found the students loved shorter books — *Stuck in Neutral*, about a boy growing up with cerebral palsy, was a favorite among the group. They watched a video about living with the disability, and they had long discussions about what makes life worth living.

The students enjoyed reading so much that when the alternative school received a grant from a local credit union to create a library at the school, many of the students involved in the Great Stories Club volunteered to help organize and shelve donated books.

“The more books they see, the more books that are available for them, the more they will read,” Angela said. The partnership has been so successful that Angela looks forward to continuing it in the coming year.

“It has been fun to have my own group of kids again,” she said. “Just being able to make those connections — that part I love.”

**GSC PRO TIP**

*Your role is one of facilitator: keep the discussion rolling and keep it on track. Don’t let yourself become a “leader” or “teacher”; remain a guide.*

Book display at a GSC gathering
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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risty Gale, teen services librarian at Seattle Public Library who conducts the Great Stories Club with teens from the Seattle Public School’s Interagency Academy Alternative High School, walks through the steps she takes to make her program experience successful.

Advance Preparation

Invite Students to Attend

Kristy has an established partnership at an alternative high school and with the English teacher, Kevin. He was instrumental in identifying individuals to participate by inviting students that he believed would benefit most from this unique approach to a monthly book club.

Because students are specifically invited to book club, they tend to view it as a special opportunity and are more likely to be invested. Once the club starts, Kevin meets with the students regularly in class, so he is able to check in with them about their reading progress, as well as give them frequent reminders about upcoming meetings. Students are given class credit and are graded on their attendance and level of participation, which acts as an incentive.

Book Discussion Preparation

Kristy communicates with Kevin frequently to:

- Review discussion questions
- Talk about securing a guest speaker
- Plan the icebreaker
- Confer about student progress

Kevin touches base with his students to see how they’re coming along with their reading. Kristy locates and brings in readalikes.
**Day-of Steps**

The book club gatherings are scheduled from 11:15 a.m. – 12:40 p.m.

**10:45 a.m. – Set-up**
Kristy arrives to set up the laptop and projector (and any other equipment they may need), organize book displays and book giveaways, and set out the pizza and drinks.

**11:15 a.m. – Pizza & Review Group Ground Rules**
Students arrive and are greeted with pizza. Kristy reviews the norms and asks students for feedback and if they’d like to add anything.

**11:20 a.m. – Icebreaker**
The group spends about 10 minutes on an icebreaker to get everyone warmed up.

**11:30 a.m. – Guest Speaker Presentation**
A presentation by a guest speaker and Q & A take about 30 minutes.

**12:00 p.m. – Book Discussion**
Students are supposed to come prepared with questions they have about the book and questions they want to pose to their peers. As the facilitator, Kristy comes prepared with more than enough questions, in case the discussion stalls.

**12:30 p.m. – Media Response**
In this portion of the program, the group talks about a media project (in response to the book read and discussed or theme) that students will work on during the month. That could include art, poetry, or a blog post inspired by the reading and discussion. They also share any responses from last month.

**12:35 p.m. – Surveys**
As the group nears the end of the session, Kristy hands out surveys and passes out next month’s book.

**12:40 p.m. – Group Photo**
The group concludes with a photo of everyone posing with the book.

**Post-Meeting To-dos**

Often near the end of the grant (but sometimes during the middle), the group goes on a field trip to the library for a tour, where students can sign up for library cards, have their fines waived (if applicable), and learn about all of the resources the library has to offer. At the end of the visit, they watch a film related to a theme from one of the books.

Kevin and Kristy meet after book club to reflect on what’s working and what’s not working, and they revise plans for the next month’s book club based off of these reflections.

Kristy promotes the book club on the library’s book club blog ([teenbookclubtpl.wordpress.com](http://teenbookclubtpl.wordpress.com)). She continues to work with Kevin to get him to solicit student work for the blog. She also follows up with guest speakers/community partners for feedback.
Juvenile Detention Center Program Walk-Through

Schenell Agee, supervisor of library media programs and research for Prince William County Schools in Virginia, conducts the Great Stories Club with the local juvenile detention center. Here, Schenell walks through the steps she takes to make her program experience successful.

Advance Preparation

Working with students in the Juvenile Detention Center (JDC) has been one of the most rewarding experiences of Schenell’s career. The principal of the center attends monthly meetings at the district’s central office, and prior to starting the club, Schenell had already taken steps to begin building a relationship.

After learning about the Great Stories Club, she felt it would be a great way to make connections with students while having them think critically about our world. The goal was to let students know they are not alone, especially during a very difficult period of their lives, using literature to spark conversations about complex subject matters like empathy and heroism.

Prior to meeting with the students, Schenell scheduled visits with the staff. They routinely rescheduled due to weather and various in-house occurrences on their end. Due to nature of the facility, snacks were not allowed. The students were in a classroom setting with their reading teacher.

Day-of Steps

Introduction

The first thing she wanted to establish was the purpose of the visit and subsequent visits over the next the few months. She read out loud a short version of this introduction:

This is a book club that will read and discuss three books over six meetings during the 2018–19 school year, and students get to keep copies of the books. This project is a grant from the American Library Association and National Endowment for the Humanities.

Ground Rules

Next, she discussed expected outcomes for a lively conversation:

1. Be respectful — let everyone have a voice
2. One person speaks at a time
3. Participate
Icebreaker and Read Aloud

Every session began with an icebreaker. (The first icebreaker, she introduced the Hoberman Sphere, a flexible dome that can be expanded and contracted. It can help teach students how to control their breathing. This can also be used with students who experience anxiety). Then, she and group read aloud or watched a video related to the book and/or topic.

Discussion and Activity

The group then discussed the book. For those who had not read the book, Schenell did some sectional reading in class. They concluded with an activity when possible; for example, in one session, they read a poem and conducted a character analysis.

The goal of sharing books was well received. The conversations and activities did not always hit the mark. This was due in part because many of the students were often first-time attendees. Because of the challenge of having first-time or one-time attendees, Schenell said it is important to have big themes ready to share and a concrete activity in which every student can participate.
Finding and maintaining a relationship with another organization — whether it is a school, detention center, or nonprofit — takes the right amount of research, expectations, and effort.

Miguel Ruiz, community information coordinator at the Skokie Public Library, knows a thing or two about partnerships. Having worked for libraries around the Midwest, he has partnered with several institutions. Here, he offers his tips for success.

**Treat Finding a Partner Like a Research Project**

To find the right community partner, first consider what it is you hope to achieve by listing out your goals and the goals for your partner. Then, look around for a partner institution that shares the same vision and mission as the library. Miguel starts by searching the Internet, but often also connects with city officials or a human services office who might have more knowledge of a partner that would be a good fit.

Miguel often finds that well-established institutions, like nonprofits, often make the best partners, since they have similar missions/visions and can commit to making a partnership work.

**Pitch the Partnership to Library Administration**

The partnership sounds great in your head — but how do you sell it to library leaders? Miguel recommends selling the idea by ensuring you have answers to any questions they might have: what the program is, who the organization is, how much of your time it will take, who will be involved, etc.

“At the end of the day, most administrations care about what the effect on the community will be,” Miguel says. “You need to be organized and be prepared to answer that.”

**Meet with Your Partner Face to Face**

Once you have permission from leadership and think you’ve found the right partner, call them up. That can be uncomfortable for some librarians, Miguel says, but it’s the right first step. “If they aren’t available for a meeting, sometimes it’s an indicator that they don’t have the capacity or commitment for the partnership,” he says.

Once a meeting is set, Miguel recommends doing homework on the organization practicing “individual relational meetings,” a face-to-face meeting where the purpose is to lay the groundwork for a public relationship. That way, the organization knows you are looking at them as a potential partner and you can lay the groundwork for goals and accomplishments.
If the meeting doesn’t go well, or the partnership isn’t a right fit, don’t worry — sometimes those meetings still lead to different partnerships down the road.

**Maintain a Good Relationship by Defining Workload and Success**

Once a partnership is verbally established, it’s important to make sure everyone is clear on what their role is and to ensure they have capacity to meet those needs. Sometimes that results in a formal document, like a memorandum of understanding, but often it’s a verbal agreement. “Make sure the commitment is clear,” Miguel says. “And make sure you keep your end of the bargain.”

**Bring Your Whole Self to the Partnership**

“Partnership don’t have to be stuffy,” Miguel says. “Partnerships can be bubbly and friendly.” While it’s important to have agreements, it’s also important to build a rapport and a relationship with the people with whom you are working. “Partnerships flourish when you get to a deeper level with people,” he says. “Real relationships can go a long way.”
How to Lead Discussions

When discussing sensitive topics, it’s important to lay some ground rules and be ready to facilitate the discussion in order to manage conflict and probe deeper into certain topics.

Here are some tips from Everyday Democracy, an organization that works to make engagement and public participation a strong aspect of democracy.

Before the Discussion: Set Ground Rules or Group Agreements

Ground rules or group agreements provide a set of expectations for all discussion participants. Sample ground rules include:

- Everyone gets a fair hearing.
- Seek first to understand, then to be understood.
- Share “air time.”
- If you are offended or uncomfortable, say so, and say why.
- It’s OK to disagree, but don’t personalize it; stick to the issue. No name-calling or stereotyping.
- Speak for yourself, not for others.
- One person speaks at a time.
- Personal stories stay in the group, unless we all agree that we can share them.
- We share responsibility for making the conversation productive.

During the Discussion: Be an Active Facilitator

Being an active facilitator doesn’t mean taking over the conversation. Here are several strategies for helping the discussion along.
**Reflect and Clarify**

Restate an idea or thought to make it clearer.

- “Let me see if I’m hearing you correctly . . . ”
- “What I believe you are saying is . . . ”

**Summarize**

Briefly state the main thoughts.

- “It sounds to me as if we have been talking about a few major themes . . . ”

**Shift Focus**

Move from one speaker or topic to another.

- “Thank you, John. Do you have anything to add, Jane?”
- “We’ve been focusing on views 1 and 2. Does anyone have strong feelings about the other views?”

**Ask Probing or Follow-Up Questions**

Use questions to help people explore disagreements, understand multiple perspectives, and uncover common ground.

- “What are the key points here?”
- “What would someone with a different point of view say?”

**Manage Conflict**

Help manage conflict and disagreement to be productive.

- “Let’s refer to our ground rules.”
- “What seems to be at the heart of this issue?”
- “What do others think?”

**Use Silence**

Allow time and space for reflection by pausing between comments.

**Use Non-Verbal Signals (Body Language)**

Recognize and understand how people communicate without using words. Consider how you are sending signals from your own body and how to signal encouragement and participation.

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For more tips, including tips on cross-cultural communication, view the guide online

everyday-democracy.org/resources/guide-training-public-dialogue-facilitators
Three Arts-based Activities

Art activities offer an active, creative way to amplify book discussions. Here are three creative, hands-on ways that may complement your conversations, courtesy of past Great Stories Club grantees.

**Take a Gallery/Graffiti Walk**

This hands-on activity may be done using chalk, large pieces of paper, etc., but the idea is to create a walkway where teens write down words they’ve used or have been directed toward them that stereotype their race, gender, and/or religion.

Once all responses are “on display,” have the group walk through these words together and discuss how they feel, why they may use these words, and how they can change these misrepresentations. In addition, ask teens to write down “I AM” statements to create a wall that rejects stereotypes and allows them to make a statement about identity to eliminate stereotypes and appreciate the differences in others.

**Create Your Own Mask**

Several characters in Great Stories Club books wear masks. Help your members create their own masks using papier-mache and discuss how they represent both their inner and outer selves and how the masks relate to the books you are discussing.

**Design “Where I’m From” Posters**

Encourage book club members to create “where I’m from” posters using prompts such as “stereotypes,” “obstacles overcome,” and “things missed.” Posters can be created using clips from newspapers and magazines, as well as with art supplies.
Five Reasons to Read Great Stories Club Books Aloud

When Boston Public Library librarian Ally Dowds partnered with a local alternative middle school for the Great Stories Club, she was prepared to lead discussions around the selected books. But the teacher she partnered with told her that the class read all of their books aloud, turning reading into a communal activity. “I said, sure, let’s go with it,” she said.

The result was a much more dynamic, inclusive experience, and Ally offers a few reasons for other book clubs to try it.

1. **It overcomes varying reading levels.** In alternative schools, students can have a wide range of reading abilities. Some students were eager, independent readers, while others never picked up a book. Asking student to listen to the story as it’s read aloud is not only a way to overcome this, it’s an alternative method of literacy that breeds inclusivity. “It slows things down, in a good way,” she said. “It allows students to not feel self-conscious about their abilities.”

2. **It keeps everyone on the same page.** Ally or her partner teacher did most of the reading aloud, but students followed along in their own books. As they read, they stopped to discuss themes that they had just encountered in that chapter. “We could interact with the pages and bring the text to life more,” she said. “You have a captive audience.”

3. **It offers chances to teach new vocabulary.** Many adult readers have the ability to understand new words based on contextual clues, but many middle school students don’t. As she was reading, Ally would stop to make sure all the students understood a meaning of a word.

4. **It keeps students engaged.** By reading aloud and stopping to discuss the book, Ally was able to keep students interested in the text and discussing it with the class. “By reading aloud, you are requiring that engagement,” she said.

5. **It allows librarians to leave their comfort zones.** When Ally read *Kindred*, a graphic novel that explores narratives around slavery, she knew she would run into racially derogatory words. Though the teacher and the class had previously had a conversation about the graphic imagery and language in the book, Ally did not feel comfortable saying those words aloud and omitted them as she read. But when the students questioned her about that choice, it sparked a conversation between Ally, her partner at the school, and the teens. She began to read them, and realized it offered a way into a discussion about language and its historical significance. “I was interfering due to my own discomforts, which was a teaching moment to me,” she said. “I think anyone in this position should not make assumptions about what is best, and instead confer with either teachers or discuss directly with the teens themselves — treat them as active, mature participants of the group. It’s for and about them, at the end of the day.”
Tips for Helping Book Club Members with Trauma and Mental Illness

The Great Stories Club is designed to reach underserved teens — individuals who may have experienced difficult life circumstances. Discussion leaders should be prepared to help teens in case the books or discussions trigger certain emotions. While these resources can never replace school psychologists or social workers, they can offer a starting point for your preparations.

Be a Good Listener

A common principle for supporting people you believe may be in crisis involves using the ALGEE model, which focuses on helping without putting either yourself or the student in harm’s way.

- Assess the risk of suicide and/or harm
- Listen non-judgmentally
- Give reassurance
- Encourage professional support
- Encourage other supports

Guide them to Online Resources

- MedlinePlus’s Teen Mental Health site: medlineplus.gov/teenmentalhealth.html
  Run by the National Library of Medicine, this site provides info on emotional health issues and treatment options.

- TeensHealth: kidshealth.org/en/teens
  Run by the nonprofit Nemours Center for Children’s Health Media, this site provides accurate, up-to-date health information that’s free of “doctor speak.”

- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention: afsp.org
  Offers info on how to prevent suicide and cope with a suicide loss.

Help them Find the Right Apps

- Mood 24/7 allows users, including teens, to send a daily text message about how they feel to a doctor, a therapist, or loved one.

- BoosterBuddy helps teens by
  - Checking in with how they are feeling each day
  - Helping them keep track of appointments and medications
  - Offering coping skills
  - Developing self-care routines
Dos and Don’ts of Working with a Juvenile Detention Center

Amelia Jenkins had been working with Alaska’s Division of Juvenile Justice for years when she first applied for a Great Stories Club grant several years ago.

So when the division asked her to conduct the club with a group of teenage boys in a juvenile detention treatment center, it seemed like a natural fit. She meets with the group of 12- to 19-year-olds once a month, in a room with their teacher. The books are part of their curriculum, and generally the boys are happy to participate. “They are excited to chat with somebody different, to have a conversation rather than do tasks,” she said.

Amelia offered several tips for connection with juvenile detention centers:

- **DO find the right partner.** “The thing that makes it work is having a teacher who is invested in making it work,” she said. Amelia’s partner teacher makes the book club a priority every month and sits in on the discussion to ensure students don’t dominate the discussion or try not to participate.

- **DON’T get discouraged if a juvenile detention center does not want to be a part of the club right away.** “Everybody that works in juvenile centers is scrambling, doing incredible work every day, and they often don’t have the resources and support they need. If one teacher doesn’t want to partner, try someone else. There is usually somebody who will be excited about it.”

- **DO be prepared to fill out a background check form.** Juvenile centers must ensure that visitors can provide a safe environment for students.

- **DON’T be intimidated by the students.** “They can smell intimidation instantly and try to exploit it,” Amelia said.

- **DO be open to rolling with the situation.** Sometimes, several students will arrive at the book club discussion without having read the book. Amelia always brings along a list of questions — about the book, about the characters, or even short questions about the students’ lives — and she refers to it when the discussion slows down. If a student isn’t participating, she will hand him the list and ask him to pick a question to answer.

- **DON’T approach students like you know something they don’t.** “That never works,” Amelia said. Librarians should be aware of their own privilege and remember that students have often lived through trauma that librarians haven’t experienced.

- **DO trust the books.** Oftentimes, librarians only need to be a conduit to the messages conveyed in the text. Amelia found that students often had breakthroughs just through seeing characters they could identify with, or by reading about characters whose plights they did not fully empathize with before.
THANK YOU

ALA is grateful to the librarians, humanities scholars, authors, racial healing practitioners, and others who make the Great Stories Club possible, as well as those who contributed their time and expertise to this programming guide. Special thanks to Lainie Castle, Mary Davis Fournier, Samantha Oakley, Sarah Ostman, and Brian Russell of the ALA Public Programs Office; Jody Gray, Kristin Lahurd, and Wendy Prellwitz of the ALA Office for Diversity, Literacy, and Outreach Services; Dr. Gail C. Christopher, Monica Haslip, Leslie King, Valeriano Ramos, Davet’a Saunders, Kristy Gale, Deborah Will, Annette Alvarado, Jennifer Hatcher, Kohnee Harmon, Angela Hartman, Schenell Agee, Allison McKim, Miguel Ruiz, Ally Dowds, and Amelia Jenkins. Finally, our heartfelt appreciation to the following Great Stories Club advisors for their knowledge, guidance, and support.

MK ASANTE is a best-selling author, award-winning filmmaker, rapper, and professor who CNN calls “a master storyteller and major creative force.” MK is the author of four books, including Buck: A Memoir, which was praised by Maya Angelou as “a story of surviving and thriving with passion, compassion, wit, and style.” Buck made the Washington Post best-seller list in 2014 and 2015 and is a NAACP Image Award finalist. MK is a prize-winning filmmaker and a Sundance™ Screenwriting Fellow for the movie adaptation of Buck.

MK studied at the University of London, earned a B.A. from Lafayette College, and an M.F.A. from the UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television. MK has given distinguished lectures at Harvard, Yale, Stanford, as well as hundreds of other universities. He has toured in over 40 countries and was awarded the Key to the City of Dallas, Texas. Called “the voice of a new generation” by Essence, he has been featured on the CBS Early Show, VH1, NPR, The Breakfast Club, and MTV. He was selected as “100 History Makers in the Making” by MSNBC The Grio, and his inspirational story “The Blank Page” is featured in the #1 New York Times best-seller, Chicken Soup for the Soul: 20th Anniversary Edition. MK’s essays have been published in USA Today, Huffington Post, San Francisco Chronicle, and the New York Times.

Described by Vibe magazine as “brilliantly complex,” MK is a hip hop artist who has performed globally and collaborated with King Mez, 9th Wonder, Talib Kweli, and others. MK is a distinguished professor-in-residence at the MICA School of Ideas in India and a tenured professor of creative writing and film at Morgan State University.

GREAT STORIES CLUB THEME: “What Makes a Hero? Self, Society, and Rising to the Occasion”

WINI ASHOOH is a youth services/teen specialist librarian at the Central Rappahannock Regional Library System in Virginia. She provides library services to the teen residents at the Rappahannock Juvenile Center (RJC) in Stafford, Virginia. The RJC is an 80-bed facility that provides secure incarceration for court-ordered youth, crisis intervention, substance abuse, and counseling services.

GREAT STORIES CLUB THEME: “Deeper Than Our Skins: The Present Is a Conversation with the Past”

ANDREW AYDIN is creator and co-author of the #1 New York Times best-selling graphic memoir series March, which chronicles the life of congressman and civil rights icon John Lewis. Co-authored with Rep. Lewis and illustrated by Nate
Powell, *March* is the first comics work to ever win the National Book Award, and is a recipient of the Will Eisner Comics Industry Award for “Best Reality-Based Work,” the Robert F. Kennedy Book Award Special Recognition, and the Coretta Scott King Book Award Author Honor. The *Washington Post* heralded the completion of the *March* trilogy, saying, “The closest American peer to *Maus* has arrived.”

Today, Andrew serves as digital director and policy advisor to Congressman Lewis in Washington, D.C. Andrew’s other works include the 2016 X-Files Annual (IDW), the 2016 CBLDF Annual Liberty, and an upcoming issue of Bitch Planet, as well as articles for the Atlanta alt-weekly Creative Loafing and the Southern Poverty Law Center’s Teaching Tolerance Magazine.

GREAT STORIES CLUB THEME: “Growing Up Brave on the Margins: Courage and Coming of Age”

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**LAURA BATES** is professor of English at Indiana State University. She enjoys teaching a wide range of courses, from Children’s Literature to World Literature, Shakespeare, and Crime and Punishment. With a Ph.D. (University of Chicago, 1998) in comparative literature, her academic training involved classic world literature alongside contemporary texts and theory. Her dissertation focused on Shakespearean reception, directed by internationally respected scholar David Bevington. She is the author of *Shakespeare Saved My Life: Ten Years in Solitary with the Bard* (2013, Sourcebooks) and has spent more than 20 years working as a volunteer and an instructor in prisons in Chicago and Indiana.

GREAT STORIES CLUB THEME: “Structures of Suffering: Origins of Teen Violence and Suicide”

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**EDITH CAMPBELL** is an assistant librarian in the Cunningham Memorial Library at Indiana State University. As part of the Reference and Instruction team, she serves as the liaison to the Bayh College of Education. Edith was elected to the 2018 YALSA Printz Award Committee and has been appointed the ALSC Sibert Committee from 2019–21. She is on the advisory board for the online peer-reviewed journal, *Research on Diversity in Youth Literature*. Her research interests include the visibility of Black girls in young adult literature and implementing mind and brain research in library practices. She blogs to promote literacy, decolonization, and social justice in young adult literature at CrazyQuiltsEdi. Edith received her B.A. in economics from the University of Cincinnati and M.L.S. from Indiana University.

GREAT STORIES CLUB THEME: “Deeper Than Our Skins: The Present Is a Conversation with the Past”

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**MARIA SACHIKO CECIRE** is associate professor of literature at Bard College in New York and founding director of Bard’s Center for Experimental Humanities, which focuses on how technologies mediate the human experience. She is the author of *Re-Enchanted: The Rise of Children’s Fantasy Literature in the Twentieth Century* (University of Minnesota Press, 2019) and co-editor, with Hannah Field, Kavita Mudan Finn, and Malini Roy, of *Space and Place in Children’s Literature, 1789–Present* (Routledge, 2015). She has been a National Project Scholar with the Great Stories Club since 2014; her other public-facing humanities work includes podcasting, documentary films, and short fiction. Maria received a Rhodes Scholarship in 2006.


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**VANESSA “CHACHA” CENTENO** is a youth services librarian with the Sacramento Public Library. She is best known for her work with immigrant and refugee families, advocacy for at-risk youth, and diversity representation in libraries. Before her career as a librarian, Vanessa worked with chronic homeless populations and interned with her local Juvenile Probation
Department while completing a baccalaureate degree in criminology and criminal justice. She has brought services to at-risk communities through partnerships with groups serving youth in special education, and by advocating for change in policy and service to foster and group home youth. Vanessa was raised amongst family with diverse Chicano and American Indian backgrounds and credits her grandmothers for teaching resilience and nurturing her love for younger generations. She enjoys storytelling and believes it teaches and preserves culture while healing the wounds of generational trauma. She is an enrolled member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.

**GREAT STORIES CLUB THEME:** "Deeper Than Our Skins: The Present Is a Conversation with the Past"

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**ANGELINA M. CORTES** is a reference librarian and diversity trainer at Sno-Isle Libraries in the rural Snohomish and Island counties of the Pacific Northwest. She provides cultural competency, diversity, and inclusion training to internal employees of 21 community libraries in the area. She has worked in private, academic, and public libraries as a cataloger, archivist, and special librarian. Angelina is a partner with the Social Justice Education Around Technology (S.E.A.T.) Institute based out of Washington’s Puget Sound area. Angelina holds a master of library and information science from the University of Washington at Seattle and a bachelor’s of Spanish and Latin American literature and creative writing from the Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington.

**GREAT STORIES CLUB THEME:** "Finding Your Voice: Speaking Truth to Power"

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**ANNA CVITKOVIC** is a teen librarian with the San Francisco Public Library (SFPL). She runs the library at Log Cabin Ranch, a detention facility for teenage boys within the Juvenile Probation Department, where youth have discovered an unlikely passion for knitting. She also leads library outreach programming for youth experiencing parenting, homelessness, and other challenges, and has developed the first SFPL program specifically for transitional-aged youth. In her spare time, Anna loves roller-skating, nail art, and reading in the sun, and is a terrible but enthusiastic gardener.

**GREAT STORIES CLUB THEME:** "Growing Up Brave on the Margins: Courage and Coming of Age"

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**JOSLYN BOWLING DIXON** is the assistant director for the Prince William Library System, serving Prince William County, Virginia. Joslyn has a depth of public library knowledge that spans 20 years of extensive management experience and includes supervising service to children and young adults in urban and suburban public library systems in Illinois, Maryland, the District of Columbia, and Virginia. Joslyn serves on the Coretta Scott King Awards Executive Committee as the chair of the Marketing Committee and has presented at ALA national and regional conferences on the subject of spaces, places, and literature for teens, as well as the need for civil discourse on race using the public library as an effective catalyst and platform for change. Joslyn has a B.A. in English from Hampton University and earned her MLIS in 2008 at Dominican University.

**GREAT STORIES CLUB THEME:** "Finding Your Voice: Speaking Truth to Power"

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**ALLYSON DOWDS** is the youth technology librarian for Teen Central at the Boston Public Library. In this role, Allyson coordinates efforts to bridge the technology gap among urban youth by working with and for youth to identify community partners as well as design and implement a STEAM-based curriculum within and beyond the walls of the library. Prior to this work, Allyson served as a library manager in the Massachusetts Department of Corrections, working with both incarcerated men and woman since 2009. During her tenure, she established several humanities programs for inmates, including the first Art Group, a family literacy program in conjunction with a local public library, as well as a Poetry Group
that was co-convened with a Pushcart Prize–winning local poet. Also, she facilitated a regular reading and discussion program called ABLE MINDS (Altering Behaviors through Literary Exploration and Moderated Inquiry-based Discussion Sessions). Ally holds a bachelor of arts in journalism from Loyola University of Chicago and an MLIS from Simmons College.

**GREAT STORIES CLUB THEME:** “Empathy: The Cost of Switching Sides”

**ANNA MAE DUANE** is associate professor of English at the University of Connecticut. She is the author of *Suffering Childhood in Early America: Violence, Race and the Making of the Child Victim* (UGeorgia, 2010); the editor of *The Children's Table: Childhood Studies and the Humanities* (UGeorgia, 2013); *Child Slavery Before and After Emancipation: An Argument for Child-Centered Slavery Studies* (Cambridge 2016), and the co-editor of *Who Writes for Black Children?: African American Children's Literature Before 1900* (University of Minnesota Press, 2016). She is also the co-editor of *Common-place: The Journal of Early American Life*. Her essays have appeared in *American Literature, The Cambridge History of the American Novel, Studies in American Fiction,* and *African American Review*. Her work has been supported by a Fulbright award, as well as fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities and Yale’s Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition.

**GREAT STORIES CLUB THEME:** “Empathy: The Cost of Switching Sides”

**NICHOLAS HIGGINS** is the director of outreach services at the Brooklyn Public Library, where he directs a unique suite of services including the Services for Older Adults department, Correctional Services, Immigrant Services, and outreach to individuals and families experiencing homelessness. From 2009 to 2013, he oversaw the New York Public Library's Correctional Services department, developing several new programs, including a New York veterans oral history project, an early literacy and book recording program for incarcerated parents, and Library School, a 12-week literature class offered for men in federal prison. In 2012, he was named deputy director of outreach services for NYPL, a position created to expand services to older adults, veterans, and individuals with disabilities. Nick began his career in 2006 at the Brooklyn Public Library, delivering targeted library services to children with disabilities, war veterans, job seekers, and formerly incarcerated Brooklynites while serving as librarian and acting manager of volunteer resources. He received an MLS from the Pratt Institute and a B.A. in British literature from Hunter College.

**GREAT STORIES CLUB THEME:** “Hack the Feed: Media, Resistance, Revolution”

**DUSHAW HOCKETT** is the founder and executive director of Safe Places for the Advancement of Community and Equity (SPACES), a Washington, D.C.-based leadership development and community-building organization dedicated to bridging the gap between what people imagine and what they achieve. A native New Yorker who now resides in Maryland, Dushaw has over 20 years of experience in community building and organizational development. He’s the former director of special initiatives for the Center for Community Change (CCC), a 40-plus-year-old national social justice organization founded in the memory of the late Robert F. Kennedy. During his 12-year tenure at CCC, Dushaw led projects focused on affordable housing, immigration, and race.

**GREAT STORIES CLUB THEMES:** “Deeper Than Our Skins: The Present Is a Conversation with the Past” and “Finding Your Voice: Speaking Truth to Power”

**NOSHEEN HYDARI,** LMFT, is a psychotherapist at Community Counseling Centers of Chicago (C4), Cook County Jail Mental Health Transition Center, and Northside Center for Relationship Counseling. In her role at C4, Nosheen has
provided crisis services to hundreds of children and adults in severe psychiatric distress, many who are victims of trauma and experiencing suicidal thoughts/behaviors and self-harm. At Cook County Jail, she provides therapy to inmates with the goal of reducing recidivism often caused by a lack of resources and safe alternatives for individuals who entered into the correctional system and have not been able to transition out. In her role as a private practice psychotherapist at Northside Center for Relationship Counseling, Nosheen utilizes her bicultural upbringing as a first-generation South Asian American immigrant in helping clients overcome constraints in their relationships. Nosheen trained in Systemic Therapy at Northwestern University’s The Family Institute. In 2014, she was selected by The White House as a Champion of Change under President Obama’s program honoring individuals working at the community level on gun violence prevention.

GREAT STORIES CLUB THEME: "Structures of Suffering: Origins of Teen Violence and Suicide"

**JENNIFER MANN** is the teen librarian for the Ypsilanti District Library. She has been a librarian for the past 15 years. She has been committed to youth advocacy and social justice issues for the past 25 years, including the role as a teacher, director of education, and researcher. Jennifer conducted archival research for the 2013 documentary *American Revolutionary: The Evolution of Grace Lee Boggs*. She has also volunteered as a book reviewer for *School Library Journal* for two years and worked on the Michigan Family History Search Project as a database indexer. As a youth librarian, Jennifer has presented at the Michigan Library Association’s annual conference and spearheaded The Library’s Network (TLN) book drive for the Grace Lee Boggs’ School in Detroit. She has implemented numerous youth and teen programs, including a Teen Science Café, a social issues book club at an alternative high school, and a technology training program for teen interns.

GREAT STORIES CLUB THEME: "What Makes a Hero? Self, Society, and Rising to the Occasion"

**SUSANA M. MORRIS** is an associate professor of literature, media, and communication at the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta and co-founder of the popular feminist blog, The Crunk Feminist Collective. Susana is the author of *Close Kin and Distant Relatives: The Paradox of Respectability in Black Women’s Literature* (UVA Press 2014) and co-editor, with Brittney C. Cooper and Robin M. Boylorn, of the anthology, *The Crunk Feminist Collection* (Feminist Press 2017). Susana is also series editor, along with Kinitra D. Brooks, of the book series *New Suns: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Speculative*, published at The Ohio State University Press. Currently, she is a Digital Integrative Liberal Arts Center fellow at Georgia Tech working on her latest book project, *Electric Ladies: Black Women, Afrofuturism, and Feminism*.

GREAT STORIES CLUB THEMES: "Finding Your Voice: Speaking Truth to Power" and "Growing Up Brave on the Margins: Courage and Coming of Age"

**MEE MOUA** is the principal of Interdependent Group, LLC, which provides training, facilitation, and coaching support for individuals and organizations in planning, leadership, and transformation. She is passionate about democracy building, heart leadership, and making visible the interconnectedness among peoples. She is currently a governance coach to a cohort of newly elected local and state officials and a consultant to the W.K. Kellogg Foundation as a law and policy expert and a racial healing circle facilitator. She is the immediate past president and executive director of Asian Americans Advancing Justice-AAJC, a leading national civil rights organization based in Washington, D.C. Prior to her work in Washington, D.C., she was an attorney in private practice in St. Paul, Minnesota, and a member of the Minnesota State Senate.

GREAT STORIES CLUB THEMES: "Deeper Than Our Skins: The Present Is a Conversation with the Past" and "Finding Your Voice: Speaking Truth to Power"
NATE POWELL is a New York Times best-selling graphic novelist born in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1978. He began self-publishing at age 14, and graduated from School of Visual Arts in 2000. His work includes March, the graphic novel autobiography of Congressman and civil rights icon John Lewis; You Don't Say; Any Empire; Swallow Me Whole; The Silence of Our Friends; The Year of the Beasts; and Rick Riordan’s The Lost Hero. Powell is the first and only cartoonist ever to win the National Book Award.

From 1999 to 2009, Nate worked full-time providing support for adults with developmental disabilities alongside his cartooning efforts. He managed underground record label Harlan Records for 16 years and performed in punk bands Soophie Nun Squad and Universe. He lives in Bloomington, Indiana.

GREAT STORIES CLUB THEME: "Empathy: The Cost of Switching Sides"

LAURA ROGERS is director of the Writing Center and assistant professor, Department of Humanities at Albany College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences. She teaches a wide range of courses, including Contemporary American Literature, American Women Writers, Crime and Punishment, and Fiction and Film. Her research interests are writing center theory and practice, critical literacy, 19th-century American women writers, feminist film theory, and prison literacies and pedagogies. In partnership with the onsite library, Laura served as the local scholar for several Great Stories Club programs at the Greene Correctional Facility in Coxsackie, New York. She has been engaged in correctional facility literacy education since 1984. Laura holds a doctor of arts in English from the State University of New York at Albany.

GREAT STORIES CLUB THEME: "The Art of Change: Creation, Growth, and Transformation"

AMIRA SHABANA is the managing school librarian for Barrington Middle School in Barrington, Illinois. Since 2009, she has worked as a school librarian at the elementary school level, junior high level, and now, high school level. She has worked in a variety of library settings — school, public, and special libraries including the Art Institute of Chicago–Ryerson & Burnham Libraries. Her academic achievements include a B.A. in history and art history from the University of Illinois, a masters of library information science from Dominican University, and a reading specialist endorsement from the University of Illinois at Chicago. She is currently part of the reader panel for the Illinois State High School Reading List Abe Lincoln Teen Choice Award and a member of the Art Institute’s Teacher Action Panel. Amira is passionate about social justice, educational equity, and the opportunity to turn this passion into action as a member of ALA’s Implementation Team.

GREAT STORIES CLUB THEME: “Finding Your Voice: Speaking Truth to Power”

MICHAEL R. WENGER is an adjunct faculty member in the Department of Sociology at The George Washington University, where he teaches classes on race relations and institutional racism. He also serves as a senior consultant on race relations with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. In this capacity, he provides guidance on the Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation effort of the Foundation and has facilitated racial healing circles at the conferences of several large organizations, including Independent Sector, the Association of American Colleges & Universities, the American Library Association, and Virginia’s Commonwealth Commission on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. He was recently named as a senior fellow at the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U).

GREAT STORIES CLUB THEMES: “Deeper Than Our Skins: The Present Is a Conversation with the Past” and “Finding Your Voice: Speaking Truth to Power”
American Library Association

The American Library Association (ALA) is the foremost national organization providing resources to inspire library and information professionals to transform their communities through essential programs and services. For more than 140 years, the ALA has been the trusted voice for academic, public, school, government, and special libraries, advocating for the profession and the library’s role in enhancing learning and ensuring access to information for all. For more information, visit ala.org.

W.K. Kellogg Foundation

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF), founded in 1930 as an independent, private foundation by breakfast cereal innovator and entrepreneur Will Keith Kellogg, is among the largest philanthropic foundations in the United States. Guided by the belief that all children should have an equal opportunity to thrive, WKKF works with communities to create conditions for vulnerable children so they can realize their full potential in school, work and life.

National Endowment for the Humanities

The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) is an independent federal agency created in 1965. It is one of the largest funders of humanities programs in the United States. Because democracy demands wisdom, NEH serves and strengthens our republic by promoting excellence in the humanities and conveying the lessons of history to all Americans. The Endowment accomplishes this mission by awarding grants for top-rated proposals examined by panels of independent, external reviewers. NEH grants typically go to cultural institutions, such as museums, archives, libraries, colleges, universities, public television, and radio stations, and to individual scholars.

Additional support has been provided by Acton Family Giving, the Ford Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts.