

SCHOOL LIBRARIES IN CANADA

A Journal of the Canadian Association for School Libraries (CASL)
A Division of the Canadian Library Association



Young People and Literature

Volume 25 Issue 1



SCHOOL LIBRARIES IN CANADA

About SLIC

School Libraries in Canada (SLIC) Online is a journal of the *Canadian Association for School Libraries*. CASL's mission is to provide national support for the development and maintenance of excellence in Canada's school libraries, media centres, and school library personnel.

Founded in 1980 (Volume 1 Issue 1), SLIC is a national forum for teacher-librarians in Canada and promotes articles of interest on a broad range of topics from collaboration with the classroom teacher to information technology/literacy skills needed to prepare students for life-long learning.

SLIC was published in print format until Volume 23 Issue 2. Since then, SLIC is published as an online journal. Older print copies are available at university libraries across Canada and recent online issues are available in our archives section.

À propos de SLIC

School Libraries in Canada (SLIC) Online est le journal professionnel du *Canadian Association for School Libraries*. La mission de CASL est de fournir un support à l'échelle nationale pour le développement et l'entretien de l'excellence dans les bibliothèques scolaires, centres médiatiques et pour le personnel travaillant dans les bibliothèques scolaires.

Fondé en 1980 (Volume 1 Édition 1), SLIC est un forum pour les professeurs bibliothécaires du Canada et publie des articles d'intérêt sur des sujets variés allant de la collaboration avec l'enseignant en classe aux compétences en alphabétisation et en technologie de l'information qui préparent les étudiants à l'apprentissage pour la durée de leur vie.

SLIC est publié en forme de magazine jusqu'au Volume 23 Édition 2. Depuis ce temps, SLIC est publié en format digital accessible sur l'Internet. De vieilles copies de SLIC sont toujours disponibles dans les bibliothèques universitaires à travers le Canada. Nos vieilles éditions de SLIC en format numériques sont accessibles en cliquant sur [Archives](#).



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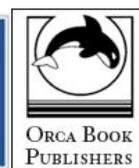
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Welcome to SLIC!

We are always interested in hearing your feedback on our site. If you have questions, comments, or concerns, please do not hesitate to [contact us](#).

Welcome!

This issue of School Libraries in Canada examines the importance of that most elusive of ideals, the equal partnership of classroom teachers and teacher-librarians. The articles present the research findings on the effectiveness of collaborative teaching practice, discuss strategies, offer suggestions, and tell tales of passion and sorrow, frustration and success. At the heart of it all is a way of teaching that requires and models mutual respect, trust, cooperation and the power of shared vision. From the dry data to the practical experience, our writers share the importance of our work to the success of our colleagues, our students and ultimately our schools. This issue also includes SLIC's first weblog - a venue for the community of teacher-librarians to discuss the challenges and rewards of collaborative teaching practice. We hope you will take advantage of this opportunity to explore the issues surrounding collaborative teaching practice with teacher-librarians across Canada and around the world.

Volume 25 Issue 2

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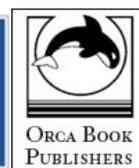
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Introduction from the Guest Editor

Chris Arnstead

Chris Arnstead received her Masters in Education in Teacher-Librarianship at the University of Alberta's June convocation. She has many years experience teaching in elementary schools in Saskatchewan and is beginning her fourth year as a teacher-librarian with Regina Public Schools.

With the current emphasis on information literacy skills and technology integration in school libraries and classrooms, finding time to promote reading and a love of books is difficult for teacher-librarians. However, this traditional role is still a crucial one and, indeed, what drew many teacher-librarians to the profession in the first place. This issue of *School Libraries in Canada* examines the universe of literature and young people.

For this issue, Betty Fitzpatrick offers an historical perspective on the relatively recent development of the genre of young adult literature. Current reading interests of students are addressed in the articles by Karen Walliser recommending graphic novels and by Claire Isaac suggesting fantasy books.

Two articles recognize the provincial centennial year in Alberta and Saskatchewan . Retiring Sask Learning Curriculum Actualization Consultant, Naomi Kral, reflects on some of her favourite Saskatchewan authors for young people. Teacher-librarian Fern Reirson reviews several new books released to coincide with the Alberta centenary.

The research I completed for my capping paper as a University of Alberta Masters of Education student in Teacher-Librarianship examines what influences young people's choice of recreational reading material. Included here is my literature review and some recommendations based on my findings for selecting, displaying and promoting books for young people.

An article written by Lori Rog and Paul Kropp characterizes the kinds of books that meet the needs of reluctant readers.

Students respond to reading and books in a variety of ways. In his article, British Columbia author David Ward offers advice about encouraging communication between authors and young readers. The beginnings of the recently formed Saskatchewan Young Readers' Choice Awards are explained in *Willow Whispers* by one of the founding directors, Liz Roberts. Students can submit book reviews to the *Wired for Words* website. Linda Shantz-Keresztes facilitates this site which reviews and recommends books for young people. In an entertaining, directed conversation, a group of Calgary teacher-librarians reveal how they use the site with students.

Another connection between books, technology, and young people is made by Gloria Antifaiff in her article about ebooks. She explains the use of a site she coordinates on ebooks for beginning readers. This site offers the opportunity to read online, download books in several formats, develop your own books from templates, and



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even contribute your own ebooks to the site.

Authorfest introduces pre-service teachers to literature and authors for young people during their university training. The article by Naslund and Jobe is full of enthusiasm and practical ideas for author visits.

Contributors to this issue include university students, teacher-librarians, a public library children's librarian, school division consultants, authors, provincial government education personnel, a director of a Young Readers' Choice organization, a university librarian, and a professor. All members of this diverse group show the same passion for reading and promoting literature for young people. I'd like to thank them for their contribution both to this journal and to the lives of young readers.



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Young Adult Literature

Betty Fitzpatrick

Betty Fitzpatrick is a teacher and language arts consultant in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. She has published three children's novels: *Melanie Bluelake's Dream* (1995), *Bay Girl* (1998), and *Whose Side Are You On?* (2000). She hopes to have a fourth manuscript completed this summer!

The development of young adult literature is a relatively recent phenomenon. Until the second half of the nineteenth century, there was no Canadian children's literature created by Canadian-born writers. Canadian books were published in London or the United States. For example, *Anne of Green Gables* was not published in Canada until 1916, while only about ten or so Canadian children's books were published between 1921 and 1923. And until 1950, there were only about nine or ten a year! Numbers slowly increased until the late 1960s and early 1970s when about fifty or sixty were published annually.

The 1980s were a turning point. More books were published in this decade than in the previous one hundred fifty years. And Young Adult (YA) fiction began to make an appearance in Canada. Some of the first novels published were: *Fly Away Paul* (1974) by Peter Davies, *Hold Fast* (1978) by Kevin Major, *Up to Low* (1982) by Brian Doyle, *In Search of April Raintree* (1983) by Bernice Culleton, and *Snow Apples* (1984) by Mary Razzel. The themes are similar to American YA fiction, and in the last two decades included homosexuality, rape, and abortion.

However, unlike much of YA fiction coming out of the United States, Canadian young adult literature emphasized region. "Firmly placed in their own backgrounds, our young protagonists are more individualized. Novels by such writers as Kevin Major and Brian Doyle speak out of their experience of place and community as they relate the experience and pain of growing up." (Egoff & Saltman, 1990, 86)

Around 1997, a new trend emerged from the United States, the so called 'bleak book.' These edgy young adult novels address dark topics such as madness, sexual abuse, mental torture, serial killing, rape and murder. The issues are tough and the discussion is honest. Often the resolutions are ambiguous. For some kids, life does not get better; the best they can do is survive.

As the content has become more sophisticated so has the appearance of the YA novel. Traditional illustrated book jackets are being replaced by glossy covers and computer generated graphics. Books are marketed as 'crossover' and are listed in both the adult and YA categories. Unconventional forms include multiple narrators, screenplay form, free verse, collections of letters, and shuttle between past and present.

While the YA novel has changed forms in its short thirty-year history most expect it to be around for a while. These trends have also emerged in Canada. Alison Lohan's *Don't Think Twice* (1997) was marketed as a crossover book. As well, more books seemed to be aimed at older teens. Ran Van in Diana Wheeler's *Ran Van: the Magic Nation* (1997) is eighteen and entering the adult world as he enrolls in SAIT to study



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cinema. *Mercy*, in Linda Holeman's *Mercy's Birds* (1998) is parenting the adults in her life as well as dealing with the unwanted attention from her aunt's boyfriend. In *Being With Henry* (1999) by Martha Brooks, seventeen-year-old Laker, in his last year of high school, is kicked out of his home. And in Glen Huser's *Stitches*, (2003) Travis, a sensitive boy who likes making sewing and puppetry, leaves the bullies behind when he graduates from grade nine and moves on to a fine-art school in the city. The issues are gritty and real, but unlike the American bleak books, there is hope at the end.

The short story has also found its place in YA fiction in Canada . Writers such as Budge Wilson, Martha Brooks, Ron McIntyre, Alison Lohans, Linda Holeman, and Bernice Friesen among others, have, within the last decade, created a body of work that has made the short story for adolescents a compelling force in Canadian literature.

New trends are emerging. With the *Dear Canada* series of historical fiction, we now have compelling stories about the people and events that shaped our own country. Maxine Trottier's *Sister to the Wolf* (2004) looks at the personal and cultural implications of French fur traders living with First Nations people as she chronicles life, through the eyes of fifteen year old Cecile, in Fort Detroit in the early 1700s. Kevin Major's *Anne and Seamus* (2003), nominated for the Governor General's Award, uses free verse to tell the story of a Newfoundland shipwreck in the 1800s.

Graphic novels, such as the biography of Riel by Canadian Chester Brown (2003), are drawing in readers. There are more novels that reflect the third world experience such as *The Breadwinner* (2000) by Deborah Ellis. Fantasy has made a comeback thanks to J.K. Rowling and Philip Pullman. Kenneth Oppel's *Airborn* (2004), which won the Governor General's award this past year, followed on the success of his *Batwing* trilogy. Picture books, both fiction and nonfiction, are increasingly accepted by older readers.

Like the readers it targets, young adult literature itself is coming of age in Canada . The 'bleak book' will continue to have appeal because it addresses real truths about and for a group of becoming adults who will not stand for anything less. However, there are more choices available now than ever to accommodate the varied interests and transitions of adolescents. The subjects and themes are as varied, dynamic, and energetic as young adults themselves.

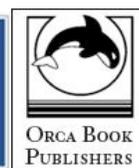
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Brown, Jennifer M., & Marzo, Cindi D. "Who so grim? Awards and controversy focus attention on a recent outbreak of dark-themed fiction for teens". [Publishers Weekly](#) 245 (7): 120-124.



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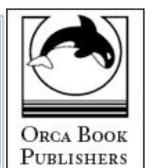
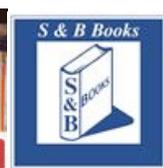
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Graphic Novels as Part of Your Library Collection

Karen Walliser

Karen Walliser is the Coordinator of Technology & Resources for the Prince Albert Catholic School Division #6. She is also the President of the Saskatchewan School Library Association.

If you happen to be asking yourself whether or not you should be including graphic novels as part of your collection the answer should be a resounding YES! "Research done by professionals in the field (of collection development) and real-life experience of librarians have shown that there is one format that covers a variety of genres, addresses current and relative issues for teens, stimulates the young people's imagination, and engages reluctant readers: graphic novels." (Gorman 2003)

A few years ago, I knew absolutely nothing of graphic novels. The comic books that were most familiar to me in my youth were Charlie Brown and Archie. After having taken the Graphic Novels and Comic Books class through the University of Alberta my interest in the format (genre) peaked. Not only have I come to appreciate the dynamics in the visuals I have also discovered that I enjoy reading graphic novels just as much as a traditional novel. I admittedly have a whole new appreciation for this style of literature that I once believed was only about superheroes saving the world. As Jeff Smith (2003) once said, "Comics do not cause illiteracy; they are literature." In fact it is my belief that graphic novels help to promote literacy while also encouraging the reluctant reader of traditional reading materials to read.

As teacher-librarians it is our responsibility to promote the love of books and encourage our students to read. As we know, reading for enjoyment competes with a student's active life-style that may include homework, sports and the Internet. Graphic novels with their visual appeal may be just what your library collection needs to assist you in developing your students to be life-long readers.

Although many articles written about graphic novels promote them for their use with the reluctant reader, students who are avid readers will certainly enjoy reading them too. As one of those keen readers of graphic novels, I have compiled a starter list of titles that are age-appropriate for any school library collection. These titles are truly a "must have" and are guaranteed to become favorites of your students.

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Gorman, Michele (2003). *Getting graphic! Using graphic novels to promote literacy with preteens and teens*. Linworth Publishing, Inc.

Must Haves for your Graphic Novel Collection

Bailey, Linda. "Adventures in Ancient Egypt ." (2000), Kids Can Press. (1550745468)

A family of three youngsters enters the Good Times Travel Agency and is transported



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into the past. Many details of Egyptian history are spun with adventure. This is the first in a series of time travel books including the Middle Ages, the Vikings and Ancient Greece. Recommended for grade 2+

Bendis, Brian. "Power and Responsibility." Ultimate Spider-Man v1 (2001), Marvel Comics. (078510786X)

This is the first volume of six of an excellent series that is a contemporary reinterpretation of the classic Spider-Man story, in which a teenage boy wakes up to find he has been incredibly empowered with super strength. This series is ongoing, so expectant readers have something to look forward to as new serialized comics are released every couple of months.

Crilly, Mark (w). "The Menace of Alia Rellapor." Akiko v1 #1-7 (May 2002), Sirius Entertainment. (1-57989-042-03)

An absolutely wonderful read as an introduction to graphic novels. Akiko is a 4th grader who is brave, adventurous and at times rather outspoken. Akiko and her unusual friends, Gax, Spuckler and Mr. Bibba spend their summer vacation on planet Smoo rescuing King Froptoppit's son. A must for every graphic novel collection! Highly recommended for all ages.

Fujishima, Kosuke (w,a). "Wrong Number." Oh My Goddess! v1 (June 2002), Dark Horse Comics. (1-569716692)

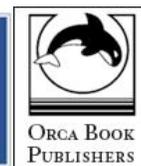
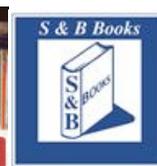
Keiichi has no luck especially when it comes to females! By mistake he calls the Goddess Technical Help Line and Belldandy, the young girl who answers the call, grants him one wish. But one thing Keiichi doesn't consider is to be careful what you wish for! Wrong Number is a fun-filled manga that is surely to be a hit in any library. Recommended for grades 5+.

Gownley, Jimmy (w). Amelia Rules! The Whole World's Crazy (2003), Simon & Schuster. (0743476038)

Uprooted from Manhattan and replanted in small-town America, nine year old Amelia Louise McBride is just trying to stay afloat and hang on to her sanity after her parents' divorce. In addition to dealing with her parent's breakup, the majority of this first issue is situated around Amelia as she adapts to life in a new town, including making new friends and enrolling in the dreaded new school. Hysterically funny, slightly irreverent, and filled with satirical wit and unexpected wisdom, this new book combines the best of classic comics with a hip new feel for the 21st century. Highly recommended for grade 3+.

Iida, Haruko (w). Crescent Moon v1 (May 2004), Tokyopop. (591827922)

This is a true manga fantasy. Mahiru brings good luck to everyone but herself! In the meantime she continuously has nightmares where the Lunar Race empowers her to help them recover their own source of power. This is a battle between the human race and the Lunar Race. Recommended for grades 7+.



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Kesel, Barbara (w), [Steve McNiven (a), Tom Simmons (a), Morry Hollowell (a)]
"Going to Ground." Meridian v2 #8-14 (March 2002), [CrossGen Comics](#). (1-931484-09-0)

If you enjoyed "Flying Solo" then you will love "Going to Ground." Sephie continues her battle against her evil Uncle Ilahn while also discovering the true ability of her powers. The young Minister of Meridian gathers an army of followers that will help her find her homeland. The Meridian series will certainly appeal to the audience of "Harry Potter" fans. Recommended for grades 6+.

Seto, Andy (w). Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon v1 (November 2002), [ComicsOne](#). (1-58899-999-8)

Kung Fu fighting in epic proportions is demonstrated in this fast-paced, beautifully illustrated graphic novel. Jeng Ho and Yu Shu Lien are the female icons in each of their feuding families. Both women's lives are entrenched in the death of Jeng Ho's father-in-law. Who murdered this man? Could it be Yu Shu Lien's father, Grand Yu? Read to find out! Recommended for grades 5+.

Smith, Jeff (w), Charles Vess (i). Bone, Volume 1: Out From Boneville, Cartoon Books. (0963660942) Note: there are 9 volumes in this series that are fast becoming all students' favorites.

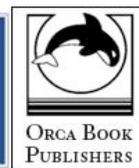
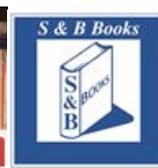
Exciled from Boneville, the three Bone cousins, Fone Bone, Phoney Bone, and Smiley Bone are now lost and separated in the desert by a swarm of locusts. While Phoney and Smiley set out together in search of the village and a reunion with their cousin, Fone's own journey to the village is peppered with intriguing encounters with an assortment of characters, including the mysterious dragon, a seemingly haunted young woman named Thorn, and her Grandma Ben. The well-written dialogue and the interesting plot filled with action and suspense pull the reader in and keep the story line moving, but Smith's subtle foreshadowing of what's to come in successive volumes of Bone is what will keep readers of all ages coming back for more.

Smith, Jeff (w), Charles Vess (i). Rose. (March 2002), Cartoon Books. (1-888963115)

Rose sets the stage as a prequel to Bone by Jeff Smith. Young Gran'ma Ben otherwise known as Princess Rose faces grave danger as a terrifying dragon lays siege to the small towns of the Northern Valley . But what Princess Rose does not realize is the fact that the dragon is actually the ancient evil Lord of the Locusts. Rose does everything in her power to try to defeat the dragon and eventually turns to her advisor for direction, who tells the princess how to eliminate the dragon but at a terrible price. Recommended for all ages.

Stackpole, Michael A. (w), Robert Teranishi (p). Star Wars Union (August, 2000), [Dark Horse Comics](#). (1-569714649)

If you are a Star Wars fanatic, then Star Wars Union is certain to be a hit! Luke Skywalker, the New Republic 's hero and sole Jedi Master, plans to marry Mara Jade, who was once the Emperor's personal assassin. The plot unfolds as both Imperial and New Republican followers make plans to stop the marriage at whatever cost! Recommended for grades 5+.



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Tolkein, J.R.R. (w), David Wenzel (i). The Hobbit (2001), Ballantine Books. (0345445600)

The vivid, fully painted illustrations in this adaptation of Tolkien's classic fantasy are sure to pull the reader in and keep him engaged in the mystical, magical world of Bilbo Baggins and Middle-Earth. Readers of all ages will love this graphic novel, for both its amazing artwork and adaptation that is remarkably true to Tolkien's original tale.

Wein, Len, Greg Potter, George Perez, Bruce Patterson. "Gods and Mortals." Wonder Woman #1-7 (March 2004) DC Comics. (1-4012-0197-0)

If you have students who are reading superheroes series such as Batman and Superman, then Wonder Woman is just for them. Wonder Woman otherwise known, as Princess Diana becomes the strongest and fastest warrior on Themyscira. Through a twist of fate, Diana finds herself in battle with the Greek god Ares but not on their home turf but rather on earth. Recommended for grades 6+.



Harry Potter's Unusual Peers

Claire Isaac

Claire Isaac has been a children's librarian for 25 years; the last 10 years as Children's Collection Coordinator at Regina Public Library. She is a founding member of SYRCA (Saskatchewan Young People's Choice Awards) and currently serves as Vice-President. Claire has a life-long passion for fantasy and science fiction, and is the proud owner of three dragon puppets, a gryphon and a phoenix.

The July publication of the sixth book in the Harry Potter series has once again focused attention on the fantasy genre in relation to young people. As has been noted many times, the Harry Potter phenomenon has encouraged the publication of new fantasy writers and the rediscovery of old ones. Writers such as Cornelia Funke (*Thief Lord; Inkheart; Dragon Rider*), Jenny Nimmo (the "Charlie Bone" series) and Garth Nix (the "Keys to the Kingdom" series), join Diana Wynne Jones, Lloyd Alexander and Ursula K. LeGuin in creating memorable heroes and adventures in fascinating imaginary worlds.

In all these books, the protagonists follow the traditional path of fantasy heroes: a quest of immense importance willingly undertaken for the good of the world, and often with a parallel personal journey of self-discovery towards maturity. These themes have immense appeal and significance to young people, who often feel powerless in their own lives and must undertake a similar journey, fraught with self-doubt and challenge, to achieve adulthood.

However, some of the recent young people's fantasy authors like Debi Gliori, Eoin Colfer, Jonathan Stroud, and Philip Pullman, have chosen to explore characters and themes which are less typically "heroic", often amoral, and sometimes tending towards wickedness. These "dark" heroes add an intriguing new dimension to young people's fantasy literature.

A riotously funny set of novels by Debi Gliori, "The Pure Dead" series, follows the tradition of both J.K. Rowling and Lemony Snicket. In *Pure Dead Magic*, the children of the Strega-Borgia family are going through some difficult times. Their father Signor Strega-Borgia has disappeared after a blazing row with their mother. Heartbroken, she leaves them to the care of their new nanny Mrs. McLachlan while she pursues higher education. However, this all too familiar modern scenario is enlivened by the family's magical traditions. Signora Strega-Borgia is studying advanced spellcraft, the family pets include a yeti, a griffin and a baby dragon in the dungeons and a crocodile in the moat. Grandmother Strega-Nonna is kept in a freezer in the cellar waiting for the discovery of a cure for old age and Mrs. McLachlan owns a magical Palm Pilot.

Like Rowling, Gliori revels in funny and significant names. The siblings are twelve year old Titus and ten year old Pandora Strega-Borgia, together with their baby sister Damp. Their home, StregaSchloss, is in the Scottish Highlands, near the village of Auchenlochtermuchty (try to pronounce that!) Evil uncle Don Lucifer Di S'Embowelli Borgia has kidnapped their father to prevent him from inheriting a fortune from their mafia boss grandfather. Pandora's giant lipstick-wearing spider



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Tarantella is naturally adept at navigating the World Wide Web.

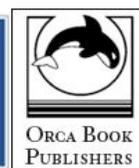
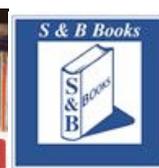
Titus and Pandora are typical pre-teens: somewhat lazy and self-centred, perpetually quarelling with each other. They would protest mightily if they were asked to go on a quest or save the world. However, when Damp is accidentally shrunk to a miniscule size and sucked into Titus' computer, Pandora braves the virtual dangers of the Internet to rescue her. Titus jumps into the moat to save Pandora from Tock the crocodile. Of course, he can't swim and Tock has turned vegetarian, but it is the thought that counts. Courage, friendship and family loyalty ensure that the Strega-Borgia's will always triumph in the end. In the second novel, Pure Dead Wicked, Titus must take responsibility for 500 miniature clones, produced by a combination of a dodgy computer program and some ectoplasm purloined from his mother.

Gliori knows what appeals to this age group. Along with dastardly villains she makes sure that there is more than a whiff of something rotten in the air. Baby Damp lives up to her name, the Yeti not only drools but has delicate digestion, the dragon drops dung from on high and Pandora's pet rats scuttle through StregaSchloss. The hilarious adventures continue in Pure Dead Brilliant and Pure Dead Trouble.

Although equally funny, a slightly more sinister aura pervades Artemis Fowl by Irish writer Eoin Colfer. Artemis is a genius, a true computer wizard. He comes from a long and aristocratic line of criminals. His father disappeared when his cargo ship was blown up delivering a load of Coca-Cola to the Russian mafia. His mother has retreated into a dreamy depression. Artemis is determined to revive the family fortunes. He has studied the old legends about fairies ransoming themselves for a hoard of gold and determines that they are true. Artemis devises a plan to secure some fairy gold. However, he reckons without Captain Holly Short, a brave and daring officer of the elite LEPrecon force. The Fairy world has technology geniuses of its own, especially a slightly paranoid centaur named Foaly. Colfer brews a mixture of old magic, high tech and low cunning into an entertaining romp of the imagination.

Artemis, despite his criminal behaviour, is an engaging hero. He is opposed to violence, especially when it is directed towards him. He wants to find a way to help his mother and if possible rescue his father. However, when he achieves these goals he finds his activities curtailed. Mr. Fowl has gone straight and expects Artemis to follow suit! Artemis has difficulty relating to anyone who is not his intellectual equal, making him a lonely figure. His closest companion is his butler and bodyguard, Butler, whose loyalty and friendship Artemis takes for granted. In the third novel, Artemis Fowl: The Eternity Code, Butler is critically injured during one of Artemis' illegal deals. Only the fairies can save him. Artemis must beg for their help and pay a great price in order to save Butler. No doubt Artemis' still faint conscience will continue to evolve in the latest book Artemis Fowl: The Opal Deception.

Eoin Colfer has also written a stand-alone fantasy The Wish List. Meg Finn, who has recently lost her mother and now has no one except an abusive step-father, helps young thug Belch break into an old man's apartment. Unfortunately, the old man Lowrie McCall wakes and sees them. Belch attacks him and Meg tries to defend the old man. Furious, Belch lets off his shotgun near to a gas tank. The resulting explosion kills both Meg and Belch. Meg finds herself in the hereafter, but with a problem. Her good and bad deeds balance out exactly, so she is sent back to Earth to help Lowrie and perform enough good deeds to earn entry to heaven. However,



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Satan wants her soul. Belch, whose soul got inextricably mixed with that of his nasty pitbull during the explosion, is sent to prevent Meg from doing any good deeds. It's a race against time as the ghostly Meg helps a dying Lowrie achieve the four items on his "wish list."

Meg is a mouthy juvenile delinquent who has zero interest in the cantankerous old Lowrie. She's only there to get enough "blue" in her aura to make it through the Pearly Gates. At first she thinks that Lowrie's long-held ambitions are pathetic and useless. Lowrie only accepts her help because Meg is his last chance to achieve something in his depressing life. As the two start their unlikely quest, they gradually get to know each other and a prickly affection slowly grows between them. In the end, Lowrie's goals truly become Meg's and she even manages to forgive and help her repulsive stepfather.

Colfer infuses The Wish List with black humour. Beelzebub, Satan's second in command, is a beleaguered executive who has to put up with his boss's unreasonable demands and a computer technician who deliberately confuses him with techno-babble. He even has to leave The World's Greatest Dictators Banquet when Hell's customs imps don't know what to do with some anomalous souls. Belch, dim-witted when alive, is hopelessly moronic when blended with his pitbull, and requires the help of an obnoxious little virtual computer demon named Elph (EctoLink and Personal Help) to carry out his mission. St. Peter would really like a good computer to help him with balancing the incoming souls' spiritual accounts, but apparently computer buffs rarely make it to heaven, so he has to continue to do the accounting with ledger and pen.

In The Amulet of Samarkand, the first book of a trilogy, Jonathan Stroud makes a demon one of the main characters. Nathaniel lives in a modern day Britain, which is ruled by a group of magicians who dominate politics and the civil service. At the age of six, he is sold to the government by his parents, and then apprenticed to magician Mr. Underwood. Nathaniel's master is distant and harsh, and he has minimal interest in his pupil. Nathaniel's only friend is Mrs. Underwood, whom he grows to love. He discovers that he has a real talent for studying magic and learns far more than his master knows.

All seems well for Nathaniel, until one day he provokes another magician, the powerful Simon Lovelace. Lovelace gives him a severe and humiliating beating in front of his master and some other visiting magicians. Nathaniel's master fails to defend his apprentice, and Nathaniel swears to have revenge on Lovelace and humiliate his master in return. Thus, years before he should attempt the feat, Nathaniel raises the demon Bartimaeus and orders him to steal a valuable magical talisman from Lovelace. Events rapidly spiral out of control.

The story is told from the point of view of both Bartimaeus and Nathaniel. Bartimaeus is a vain and ancient djinni who has literally seen it all before, from the civilizations of Babylon and Egypt to those of the modern era. As far as he is concerned, humans are a lowly life form and magicians have always been the worst of the lot. He cannot believe that a scrawny, twelve year old apprentice has managed to summon and control him, a fairly powerful and mid-ranked spirit. After all it is bad enough to be enslaved by even a powerful and famous magician like King Solomon, but to be enslaved by a mere boy is intolerable. He warns Nathaniel that he is asking for trouble to go meddling with the affairs of adult magicians. However, events force the two into an uneasy partnership to expose Simon Lovelace as a traitor.



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Nathaniel is an equally interesting character. When Mrs. Underwood is killed as a result of his actions, he is overcome with grief and guilt. His faint contempt for his master's low magical abilities grows when Underwood bows and scrapes to more powerful magicians. The desire for revenge excludes all other feelings and ambitions. He swallows the magicians' propaganda that they are a noble group dedicated to ruling the masses, and learns to have nothing but contempt for the vast majority of the unmagical population.

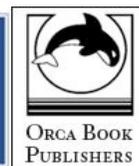
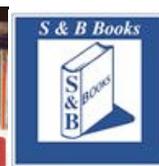
By the end of the novel, Nathaniel has achieved his goal of revenge, and has gained a powerful new master in an important government minister. He has willingly joined a corrupt and oppressive government, and has asked to help with the ongoing search for members of the commoners' Resistance. It will be interesting to see what happens to Bartimaeus and Nathaniel in the following books.

The first two books in Philip Pullman's trilogy "His Dark Materials", The Golden Compass and The Subtle Knife, were published just before the Harry Potter books and may have been somewhat obscured by the frenzy surrounding Harry. However, their excellence was rewarded with critical acclaim and the Carnegie Medal and Guardian Fiction Prize for The Golden Compass.

In a parallel world dominated by the Church, a seeming orphan named Lyra grows up in an Oxford college. Her games and exploits with the children of the town are disturbed by rumours of a gang named the Gobblers, who steal children. These are no rumours; poor children are disappearing all over England. After a brush with the Gobblers, Lyra is helped by a band of Gyptians and joins her new friends on an expedition to the North, to rescue the missing children. However, the servants of the Church have an intense interest in Lyra and her strange magical device, the alethiometer. This is a complex golden compass, which answers questions with a series of symbols. Lyra discovers that her parents are alive and estranged. Her mother, the beautiful and treacherous Mrs. Coulter, heads up the chilling scientific establishment of Bolvanger in the polar regions, which is torturing and killing the stolen children. Her cold and powerful father, Lord Asriel, is making preparations for a war on heaven itself.

Pullman creates a world filled with fantastic and memorable characters. Iorek Byrnison, the stoic, powerful mastersmith and king of the armoured bears, the ageless queen of the flying witches, Serafina Pekkala, and the Texan aeronaut Lee Scoresby, are joined in the succeeding books by two tiny yet deadly spies who ride on hawks and giant dragonflies, and the gentle, intelligent elephant-like creatures, the *mulefa*. However, Pullman's greatest invention is the daemon, the animal companion who is a person's soul made visible, possessed by every person in Lyra's world. Daemons are supremely important, tied to the immediate vicinity of their partners and giving clues to that person's character and personality. Children's daemons can change shape, but at puberty their shape becomes fixed. Lyra's lively, inquisitive and beloved Pantalaimon is a character in his own right. Mrs. Coulter's daemon is a beautiful and sadistic monkey; Lord Asriel's a powerful and sleekly beautiful leopard. When Lyra discovers that the experiments in Bolvanger sever children from their daemons she is horrified.

In the second book, The Subtle Knife, we are introduced to a new major character, Will Parry. Twelve year old Will lives in our world. His father, an explorer, disappeared in the Arctic when Will was a baby. His mother is subject to panic attacks and believes that they are being watched by some nameless enemies. Will



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discovers this to be true. He finds a safe haven for his mother, but when he returns home, he finds two men searching the house. He accidentally kills one of them. Fleeing he eventually discovers a small "window" in the air in Oxford, leading to the world of Cittagazze. There he meets Lyra, and the two join forces. When Will takes Lyra to his Oxford, the alethiometer directs her to Dr. Mary Malone, a physicist doing research on the elementary particles known as "dark matter." The two discover that it is the same thing as the mysterious "Dust" of Lyra's world, that the particles are intelligent, and that 30,000 years ago they intervened in human evolution to produce intelligence and self-awareness in humans.

In Cittagazze Will acquires a potent weapon, the "subtle knife." This is the greatest weapon ever created, able to cut a passage through to other worlds and cut any kind of matter. It is even powerful enough to kill "The Authority" the being who has usurped the role of God. As such, both the Church and Lord Asriel need it and Will, its bearer. Both Lyra and Will find that they have pivotal roles to play in the titanic battle against heaven which is waged in The Amber Spyglass.

It is interesting to wonder how Pullman chose the names of his two main characters. Did wild, passionate Lyra, with her gift of intuitive perception and knowing get her name because of its association with music? Certainly, silent, stalwart, implacable Will, who can daunt even Iorek Byrnison, is the embodiment of "will."

Pullman explores themes of great import to young people: that free will is more important than authority, that knowledge is better than innocence because it can lead to wisdom, that "matter seeks to understand itself." It takes a great writer to work with such themes, creating compelling characters in dramatic situations moving through worlds both terrifying and glorious. Pullman is more than up to the challenge.

Along with all the other fascinating heroes and heroines of fantasy, introduce your students to Titus and Pandora, Artemis and Meg, Bartimaeus and Nathaniel, Lyra and Will. They bring a rich variety to the cast of characters who traditionally populate this genre. Students are guaranteed to enjoy making their acquaintance.

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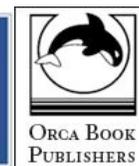
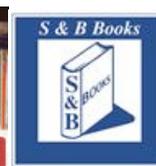
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Coming of Age: Celebrating the Saskatchewan Centennial through our Authors and Illustrators

Naomi Kral

Naomi Kral has a Bachelor of Science and a Bachelor of Education Degree. She taught Chemistry, Science, English and Math before becoming the teacher-librarian first at O'Neill High school and then at Miller Comprehensive High School in Regina, Saskatchewan. In 2003, Naomi was seconded by Saskatchewan Learning and is now retiring from the position of provincial Curriculum Actualization Consultant. Naomi loves reading and working with people.

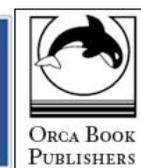
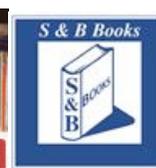
During my career as a teacher-librarian, several Saskatchewan writers spoke to my high school students. Through these wonderful experiences, the significant contributions made by authors to Saskatchewan culture became evident to me. The main reason Saskatchewan writers have become so successful is because of their ability to write about typical Saskatchewan subjects that people understand and identify with such as the weather, the landscape, and the people themselves. We appreciate the writing and the talent of our authors because they write about what is so common and of interest to all of us. People in Saskatchewan and those who have left our province buy books about Saskatchewan because they are interested in our human and natural history.

In this article I highlight the work of Saskatchewan authors read by young people in kindergarten through grade 12. I start with authors who are studied in grade twelve, and I work my way down through the grades to kindergarten to emphasize the many beautiful picture books people have written about Saskatchewan. By sampling some of these suggestions, you will discover Saskatchewan's rich literary landscape.

In *Who Has Seen the Wind*, W.O. Mitchell symbolizes the spiritual force of the wind. Everyone who has ever lived in Saskatchewan can identify with the wind. Many students will remember this book as one of the cornerstones of the English curriculum. Through his colourful tales, Mitchell shows us how to look at ourselves and appreciate the humour of life in Saskatchewan.

In contrast, *The Revenge of the Land* by Maggie Siggins shows us how the land has been both good and bad to people. It can take away from people as quickly as it can be kind or bountiful to families. Siggins also wrote *Louis Riel* about one of our famous historical figures. She arouses our interest and leaves us to ponder the question, "Was he a traitor or a hero?" In the book *In Her Own Time: A Class Reunion Inspires a Cultural History of Women*, Siggins writes a compelling account of the cultural history of women and intertwines intimate stories of love and hate, injustice and inspiration. The book explores the role that women played in five historical periods: ancient Greece, the Middle Ages, the Victorian era and the twentieth century.

Not to be overlooked is the classic novel *As for Me and My House* written by Sinclair Ross. The reader witnesses first hand the bleak world of a small prairie town during the Depression Era. Written as a journal, this novel portrays the hardships of living



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in Saskatchewan. Its fragile human relationships are rich in imagery. A few years ago, the film version of *The Painted Door* by Ross was shown in the movie theatre in Indian Head, Saskatchewan. The people of Indian Head erected a cairn to show their appreciation for the work of local author, Sinclair Ross.

Many readers passionately follow the adventures of Joanne Kilbourne, a character created by author Gail Bowen. Bowen has written a series of murder mysteries set in Regina for Joanne, a professor, television panelist, and amateur sleuth, to solve. Which would I recommend as my favorite - *A Colder Kind of Death*, *The Last Good Day*, or *Burying Ariel*? I am not sure. Maybe I would pick *Burying Ariel* since the action in the novel takes place in the library! If you would rather watch political infighting and suspense set in Saskatchewan, a number of Bowen's books have been produced as movies.

Author Sharon Butala writes about the Saskatchewan landscape. Butala left her career as a university professor in Saskatoon to return to the land where she enjoys ranching with her husband. Well worth a visit, Old Man On His Back is a natural land reserve near Eastend, Saskatchewan where the buffalo roam on the ranch of Peter Butala. In *Perfection of the Morning*, Butala writes about women, nature, and appreciating ranch life. In spring 2005, Butala published, *Lilac Moon: Dreaming of the Real West*. This book is a compelling blend of family stories, memoirs and history that will dispel all myths about the "West". It is a guide for a true understanding of the prairie spirit.

As a student in Esterhazy, Saskatchewan, I had the pleasure of attending school with Guy Vanderhaeghe. Vanderhaeghe's frequent visits to the movie theatre obviously inspired him to become a writer. In *Man Descending*, winner of the Governor General award, Vanderhaeghe chronicles life from childhood to old age revealing the alienation and loneliness of the many male protagonists. In *Homesick*, we are party once again to the alienation that has plagued generations of families in Saskatchewan. However, as the novel unfolds, there is a moving story of forgiveness, so essential to survival on the prairies.

Like Guy Vanderhaeghe in his stories, other authors have written about the diverse cultures in Saskatchewan. Rita Bouvier has written poems about her Métis ancestors in *Papiyahtak*. Bouvier leads her readers through children's Métis and Cree cultures, where wisdom flows from children and laughter comes from the elders. Veronica Eddy Brock also wrote a novel about a teenager's experience in the tuberculosis sanatorium at Fort Qu'Appelle entitled *The Valley of the Flowers: a Story of a TB Sanitorium*.

University of Regina professor Ken Mitchell's writing fascinates students. Mitchell, one of Canada's most respected authors, writes fiction, poetry, film scripts and plays but is best known as a dramatist. Some of his successes include *Gone with the Burning Sun*, *Cruel Tears* and *The Shipbuilder*. *The Shipbuilder*, set in the 1930s in Saskatchewan, is based on the true story of a Finnish homesteader who built a huge iron ship on his prairie farm. Jaanus Karkulainen had trouble adapting to the community life on the prairies. He drove away his wife and daughter and started to build a ship to sail back home to Finland. He built his ship near Outlook, Saskatchewan and planned to pull it with horses to the Saskatchewan River so he could sail to Lake Winnipeg, then to the Nelson River, across to the Hudson Bay through the Hudson Strait to the Atlantic Ocean, and finally home to Finland. Readers will experience the hardships of a prairie homesteader's life and how his obsession with building a ship drove him insane. *The Shipbuilder* has been staged across Canada and developed into a motion picture.



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In 2000, Glen Sorestad was designated the first Poet Laureate of Saskatchewan by the Canadian government. Sorestad is known for his poetry about the natural world. In *Leaving Holds Me Here*, Sorestad writes about the prairies, places and people of Saskatchewan with an unabashed sense of reality about this tough landscape with all its trials and tribulations. In *Hold the Rain in Your Hands*, Sorestad carefully crafts the subtlety of human relationships. Glen Sorestad's tenure as Poet Laureate ended on December 31, 2004.

Louise Halfe, also known as Sky Dancer, was selected as Poet Laureate of Saskatchewan in 2005. In her first book of poetry, *Bear Bones and Feathers*, we follow Louise Halfe as a child. Halfe was taught to lift a bone she found in the earth, scrape her warts and then return the bone to the earth. Readers learn about the strength and dignity of her people as she draws upon her native spiritualism. Halfe writes about her grandmother, a medicine woman, who lived both in the old and modern worlds, her parents, her people who live on reserves, and the people who attended residential schools. Halfe learned the art of oral storytelling and told her own children legends through the use of classical music.

Another Saskatchewan poet who has drawn attention across Canada and around the world is Lorna Crozier. Born in Swift Current, Crozier now lives in Victoria and teaches at the University of Victoria. Crozier has won the Governor General's Award, the Canadian Authors' Association Award, the Pat Lowther Award and the CBC Poetry Award. Her collections include: *The Garden Going on Without Us*, *Angels of Flesh*, *Angels of Silence*, *Inventing the Hawk* and *Everything Arrives at the Light*. *A Saving Grace* is a collection of poems written about Mrs. Bentley, the famous woman character from *As for Me and My House* by Sinclair Ross. In this book, Crozier revisits the imaginary town of Horizon, Saskatchewan fifty years later to explore the loneliness of living here during a period of drought. The poems capture the grasslands and the spirits of wind, dust and sky.

Another poet, Gary Hyland, a high school teacher and writer from Moose Jaw, recovers lost experiences and forgotten dreams in clear and direct language in his book *Street of Dreams*. In the poem "Saskatoons", he describes vividly the experience of picking berries, which will bring a smile to the face of anyone who has ever picked these delicious berries. Hyland has written a number of other books, *Just off Main*, *Home Street*, *The Work of Snow*, and been involved with the editing of *100% Cracked Wheat* and *Number One Northern*.

Gary Hyland was involved with Lorna Crozier in the editing of a Saskatchewan poetry anthology, *A Sudden Radiance*. This book includes poets that are current and former residents of Saskatchewan. Included is Don Kerr's poem "Editing the Prairie" which explains why we all return to Saskatchewan at some point in our lives. Other notable poets from this anthology are Elizabeth Brewster, Mick Burrs, Anne Campbell, Robert Currie, Patrick Lane, Andrew Suknaski and Anne Szumigalski. Read this anthology to experience the radiance of poetry on the prairies.

Students are attracted to the warm, sincere writing of Alison Lohans because it shows that young men and women have the same complex personalities as adults. Her novels are *Can you Promise me Spring?*, *Who Cares About Karen?*, *Foghorn Passage*, and *Don't Think Twice*. In *Laws of Emotion*, a collection of short stories, Lohans explores the emotions surrounding attraction, pregnancy and loss. Lohans also tried her skill at writing a picture book, *Waiting for the Sun*, about waiting for the birth of a child.



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An author very popular amongst young adult readers is Arthur Slade. *Draugr* and *The Loki Wolf* are part of the Northern Frights series and grew out of the author's interest in Norse folktales. *Dust*, a haunting story set in the Depression Era in Saskatchewan, won the Governor General's Award in 2001 for Children's fiction. *Tribes* is an anthropological thriller about high school students in Saskatchewan.

Dianne Warren has written three collections of short stories that revolve around relationships, to which people can easily relate, as well as a play, *The Last Journey of Captain Harte*. Warren, working with Jacquie Johnston, selected *Eureka: Seven One-Act Plays for Secondary Schools* to promote drama in the classroom. In March 2005, Warren won the Marian Engel Award, which is awarded annually by the Writer's Trust of Canada to a female writer in mid-career for a body of work.

Shelley Leedahl has been recognized with seven Saskatchewan Writers' Guild Awards for her literary excellence. Leedahl has written fiction (*Tell Me Everything, Skykickers*), non-fiction (*Talking Down the Northern Lights*) and poetry (*A Few Words for January*). In *A Few Words for January*, the language and structure she uses in her poems will make one not only want to read her poetry but also to study it.

In 2000, Beth Goobie won the Saskatchewan Book Children's Literature Award for her book, *Before Wings*. *The Lottery* is a novel about bullying in high schools based on a short story by American author Shirley Jackson. In *Flux*, Goobie writes about a totalitarian society, and draws the reader into the search for Nellie's mother whose disappearance leaves the young girl devastated. Goobie paints a bleak world, which she personifies to such an extent that it often seems alive. *Flux* won the Children's Literature Award at the Saskatchewan Book Awards in 2004. Goobie is writing a sequel called *Fixed*, which was published in March 2005.

Betty Dorion is another writer whose subject matter is the people in her Saskatchewan community. In her first novel, *Melanie Bluelake's Dream*, Dorion's career as a teacher of First Nation and Métis children in Saskatchewan helped her to convey how it feels to be different in an unfamiliar community. Non-native readers glimpse the hardships of life for people on a reserve as well as the difficulties they face when they enter a mainstream community. The story is told in a straightforward way showing the hopes and dreams of a struggling family.

Dave Glaze has written a series about pelicans in northern Saskatchewan. *Pelly* and *Waiting for Pelly* will prompt young readers to learn more about the environment and native species in Saskatchewan. At the present time Glaze is working on a story called *Save Pelly* that will be available soon.

Ed Willett has written some popular science fiction works such as *The Soul Worm* and *Spirit Singer*. In 2002, *Spirit Singer* won the Regina Book Award at the Saskatchewan Book Awards. Willett has written articles for the local papers and journals on science and science related topics and is a regular guest on CBC radio.

Mary Harelkin Bishop, a teacher-librarian, has written a popular series of time-travel stories about the Tunnels of Moose Jaw. The first book in the series, *Tunnels of Time: A Moose Jaw Adventure*, describes the tunnels in the 1920s, and the children in the novel are linked to famous villains from the past. In the second adventure, *Tunnels of Terror*, Andrea and her brother Tony travel back to the time period of her grandparents. In *Tunnels of Treachery* we learn firsthand what Chinese people



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experienced as new immigrants to Canada . Students learn about one of the darker moments of our country's history and, as a result, can appreciate the cultural diversity upon which the province was built. As a part of our history in the province, the tunnels offer intrigue to young readers. *Tunnels of Tyranny* that is scheduled to be published in 2005.

Two-time Saskatchewan Children's Literature Award Winner, Judith Silverthorne, has written *Dinosaur Hideout* and its sequel entitled *Dinosaur Breakout*. Silverthorne picked two winning topics, dinosaurs and time-travel, to appeal to younger students. This fall watch for a sequel to *The Secret of Sentinel Rock* entitled *The Secret of the Stone House*.

Wizards, written by Candace Savage, is a non-fiction book about alchemy, science and magic, which has garnered many awards. *Prairie a Natural History* also by Savage is a passionate history of the making of the Great Plains of North America from billions of years ago to the foreseeable future. This book won the Saskatchewan Book of the Year and the Non-fiction Award in 2004.

A Saskatchewan storyteller from Clavet, Peter Eyvindson collaborated with illustrator Rhian Brynjolson to produce *Kyle's Bath*, *Sir Thomas A Cat*, *Red Parka Mary*, and *Jen the Great One*. Eyvindson also worked with illustrator R.L. Wiebe to write *Soni's Mended Wings*, a book about a handicapped child in Haiti who experienced a miracle of love and hope when an older boy in the orphanage touched him gently. Eyvindson wrote a book in rhyme *A Crow Named Joe*, illustrated by Doug Keith. All children will identify with the trials and tribulations of raising a mischievous pet like Joe. When Joe leaves mysteriously without saying goodbye, the children are devastated, but they understand that Joe must have his freedom.

Lois Simmie is well known for her stories and poems for young people such as *Auntie's Knitting a Baby*, *An Armadillo is not a Pillow*, *What Holds Up the Moon* and *Mister Got to Go: The Cat Who Wouldn't Leave*. *Mister Got to Go* is the true story of a very large gray cat that finds his way into the Sylvia Hotel in Vancouver to get out of the rain. Eventually, the manager realizes Mister Got to Go has extended his short stay and become not only a fixture but also a valuable employee of the hotel.

Although no longer a resident, David Bouchard is still claimed as a Saskatchewan author. There is a saying in Saskatchewan, "You can take a person out of Saskatchewan but you can't take Saskatchewan out of the person." Bouchard, born at Quill Lake , Saskatchewan , has written twenty-six books, and most of them are either about Saskatchewan land or people. For the centennial he wrote *Happy Centennial Saskatchewan*, a book of poetry with paintings by Saskatchewan artist, Hans Herold, a native of Germany who became fascinated with the prairie landscapes. *If You're Not From the Prairie*, illustrated by Regina artist, Henry Ripplinger, experiences the prairie through the eyes of a young boy and his dog as they travel through the seasons. In *Qu'Appelle*, Bouchard tells the legendary love story of a young Cree couple. Michael Lonechild's paintings capture historic prairie scenes to illustrate the lyrical text. *The Song Within My Heart* is illustrated by the award winning Cree painter Allen Sapp. It recounts childhood memories of life on a reservation and a young boy getting ready for a powwow with his grandmother's help.

In *From the Top of A Grain Elevator* Barbara Nickel uses the prairie icon of the wooden grain elevator, which is disappearing very quickly from the Saskatchewan landscape. Nickel's verse in the book is supported by the beautiful black and white images of Kathy Thiessen. Nickel's classical musical background gives rhythm and



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grace to the sonnets, long poems, and prose poems about the crocuses in spring, the beauty of the Northern Lights, the fun of attending the country fair, and the harvest at night. Adults will enjoy her poetry in *The Gladys Elegies*. Nickel has also written a novel, *The Secret Wish of Nannerl Mozart*, which was a finalist for the Geoffrey Bilson Award for historical fiction.

To conclude, I recommend my favourite author and illustrator, Joanne Bannatyne-Cugnet and Yvette Moore. Both mothers of four children each, this dynamic partnership describes the prairies through the eyes of children. In *A Prairie Alphabet*, alliterative captions describe each scene and the reader is encouraged to search out more objects beginning with the same letter in the painting. In *A Prairie Year* readers witness family life on the prairies and learn how traditions pass from one generation to the next throughout the months of the year. Saskatchewan life is governed by the changing seasons: curling and hockey in the community rink, the agricultural fair and the 4-H clubs, harvest followed by the fowl suppers, Agribition when people from all over the world come to Regina, December school concerts and friends home for the holidays.

Heartland: A Prairie Sampler is another example of this team writing a tribute to the prairies. *Heartland* is divided into themes across North America including native people, the first settlers, agriculture, foods, topography, animals, recreation, and industry. Bannatyne-Cugnet describes life on the prairies, a hailstorm in the weather section, the history of the truck on the prairies, and Cree birch bark-biting artwork. The acrylic paintings by Moore portray the prairie world accurately giving readers a detailed picture of prairie people and life.

One hundred years is not really a long period of time in the history of literature. But in this sampling of Saskatchewan writers from the last hundred years, readers can learn about the people, the history, and the land that have shaped and formed the province of Saskatchewan. Congratulations, Saskatchewan has come of age! With eager anticipation, we look forward to hearing from the next generation of Saskatchewan writers and illustrators.

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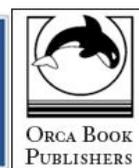
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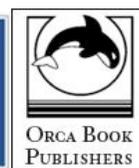
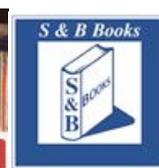
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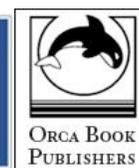
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Literary Celebration of a Provincial Centennial: Recent Books about Alberta

Fern Reirson

Fern Reirson is the teacher-librarian of Jackson Heights School in Edmonton. She is the Edmonton regional president of the Alberta Teachers' Association's Learning Resources Council.

A is Alberta: A Centennial Alphabet published by Simple Truth (2005) Ken Tingley/R. F. M. McInnis ISBN: 1-58536-223-9

This centennial project is a collaborative effort between historian Ken Tingley and painter R.F.M. McInnis. A sophisticated alphabet book, it highlights both well-known and obscure places throughout Alberta. The brief text focuses on the history and naming of Alberta communities over the past century. The full-page oil paintings display the majestic and unique geography of Alberta. Some of the paintings include historical personalities both revered and controversial that can lead readers to ponder the impact of people on the province. Tingley, one of the past-presidents of the Friends of Geographical Names of Alberta, (<http://www.albertaplacenames.ca/index.html>) has a passion for the stories behind Alberta's places. Suitable: Grade 4 up.

Alberta: Images published by Cullor Books (2004) Daryl Benson ISBN: 0968457622

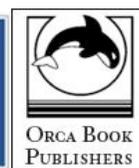
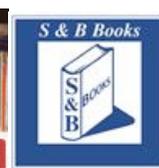
These hauntingly beautiful photographs by Benson appear more like paintings, as one cannot imagine such scenes existing in reality. The heavily bound album, appearing more like a photo journal, is a treasure as a coffee table book or as a photographic study of uncommon places in Alberta. Suitable: all ages

C is for Chinook: An Alberta Alphabet book published by Sleeping Bear Press (2004) Dawn Welykochy/ Lorna Bennett. ISBN: 1-58536-223-9

Just in time for Alberta's centennial year, Welykochy has created sophisticated, concisely written prose to match Bennett's vibrant paintings about the province of Alberta. Sidebars include interesting informational text about the topic and other words that begin with that letter. There are many surprises for even born-and-bred Albertans. Those familiar with the Sleeping Bear Press book, *Z is for Zamboni: A Hockey Alphabet*, will recognize that this alphabet book is intended for an audience of middle grade students to adults, who enjoy informational picture books. Suitable: Grade 4 up.

Under the Wide Blue Sky: Alberta Stories to Read and Tell published by Red Deer Press (2005) Lisa Hurst-Archer/Heather Urness ISBN: 0889953244

To celebrate Alberta's centennial, well-known Alberta storytellers have scripted some of their favorite tales of long-time inhabitants and new immigrants who arrived from either another province or another land. Stories brought from other parts of Canada and other countries are skillfully crafted to become as unique as when they were first told. Suitable: Grade 5 up.



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Wild Alberta : A Visual Celebration published by Fifth House (2005) Wayne Lynch ISBN: 1-894856-33-3

This well known photographic author and naturalist of over two dozen books takes readers on a photographic trip around Alberta. Readers will explore the eco-regions of the boreal forest, aspen parkland, badlands, and mountains by looking at the natural wonders and wildlife of this diverse province. Five of Canada's thirteen UNESCO designated World Heritage Sites are located in Alberta and are highlighted in this volume: Banff and Jasper National Parks, Waterton National Park, Wood Buffalo National Park, Dinosaur Provincial Park, and Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump Site. Suitable: all ages

Kidmonton: True Stories of River City Kids published by Brindle & Glass Pub (2004) Linda Goyette ISBN: 0-9732481-7-3

Personal narratives, researched through hundreds of interviews, tell the tale of Edmonton over the past century through the eyes of children. This fictionalized book recounts the stories of children from different time periods, cultures and social groups. As part of an Edmonton Public Library centennial project, a free copy of this book was sent to each school in Edmonton. A corresponding website, <http://www.edmontonhistory.ca/>, is co-hosted by the Edmonton Public Library and the University of Alberta Libraries. The interactive puzzles, photographs, stories, timeline, and virtual museum link *Kidmonton: True Stories of River city Kids* to a wealth of other online resources. This book is suitable for grades four and up. The website is appropriate for elementary school children and older.

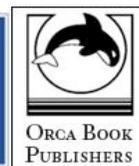
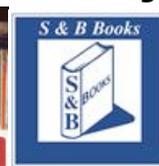
Edmonton: In Our Own Words published by University of Alberta Press (2004) Linda Goyette, Carolina Jakeway Roemmich ISBN: 0888644280

A centennial project by the City of Edmonton includes hundreds of stories, collected through oral interviews, photographs, letters, diaries, maps, and timelines. This writer and researcher team share past and present stories about the people, both infamous and common, who have helped to shape a city. Linda Goyette won the 2005 Grant MacEwan Author's Award for this historical account of Edmonton's citizens. Suitable: Grade 9 up.

Amazing Stories Series published by Saunders Book Company

This readable Canadian book series, by a host of Canadian authors, makes stories from Canadian culture and history come alive. This series encompasses a variety of genres: romance, history, sports, business, and biography. The stories of famous westerners are vividly told through crisp, action-based stories, suitable for reluctant readers. Some are suitable as a read-aloud with upper elementary students. Titles covering Alberta and western Canadian topics include:

A War Bride's Story: Risking it all for Love After World War II Alberta Titans: From Rags to Riches during Alberta's Pioneer Days Calgary Flames: Fire on Ice Christmas in Canada: Heartwarming Tales, Traditions and Legends Dinosaur Hunters: Uncovering the Hidden Remains of Canada's Ancient Giants Ghost Town Stories II: Red Coat Trail Marie-Anne Lagimodière: The Incredible Story of Louis Riel's Grandmother Mary Schäffer: An Adventurous Woman's Exploits in the Canadian Rockies Native Chiefs and Famous Métis: Leadership and Bravery in the Canadian West Rebel Women: Achievements Beyond the Ordinary Rescue Dogs: Crime and



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Rescue Canines in the Canadian Rockies Riding on the Wild Side: Tales of Adventure in the Canadian West Sam Steele: The Wild West Adventures of Canada's Most Famous Mountie The Heart of a Horse: Poignant Tales and Humorous Escapades The Incredible Adventures of Louis Riel : Canada's Most Famous Rebel.



Influences on Students' Self-selected, Recreational Reading Material: Literature Review

Chris Arnstead

Chris Arnstead received her Masters in Education in Teacher-Librarianship at the University of Alberta's June convocation. She has many years experience teaching in elementary schools in Saskatchewan and is beginning her fourth year as a teacher-librarian with Regina Public Schools.

"Know any good books to read?" Students ask me this deceptively simple question many times a day in my position as teacher librarian at a Kindergarten to grade 8 school. However, suggesting books to students that they will like is a very complicated task. What can I recommend to students that they will enjoy reading? How can I suggest reading materials to students in a manner to which they will be receptive? Male and female students read different material than each other and than adults. They also are influenced to choose it in different ways. Can I, or indeed any teacher-librarian, successfully predict what reading materials students will like? In order to better understand how students choose recreational reading material, this literature review explores research and professional literature in several areas.

Influences on student reading choices

Several articles show the importance of influences like series books, the Internet, non-fiction, Accelerated Reading programs, and cover art on students' reading choices. An article by Truby (2003) states that series books are particularly important for novice readers who have not yet developed confidence in their ability to make book choices. Series books reduce the risk of book selection because they provide reassuring, familiar, consistent and patterned choices. Braun (2002) highlights the importance of selecting and evaluating book review sources through a discussion of online book review websites for young people. Braun included the idea, from the Reader's Robot site, that there are four aspects to book "appeal": the genre of interest, preferred book length, reader's mood, and character development.

Kies (1995) examines the appeal of cover art to teens and first level buyers like booksellers, librarians, and teachers. She uses the changing style of cover art on subsequent editions of Lois Duncan thrillers to illustrate her point that covers must be current to be appealing. Rinehart (1998) discusses what aspects of the cover grade eight students use for choosing books. Adolescents value back-of-the-book summaries (BOB summaries) that are accurate plot summaries and that lead to a sense of what the book will be about. The BOB summary is the most commonly used element on the cover.

Moss and Hendershot (2002) examine the selection of nonfiction trade books by sixth grade students. They find self-selection, having choice in reading material, and having nonfiction books available are powerful motivators to read. They arrange motivating factors into six categories: (a) "I wonder" or curiosity about a topic, (b) visual features of the text, (c) knowledge of authors and intertextuality, (d) knowledge of book awards and genre, (e) personal connections, and (f) other readers.



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Croy (2002, a) tests the influence of giving book talks to students and the influence of the Accelerated Reader program on students' choice of books to read. The study arose from the author's concern that students were only reading the Accelerated Reader books for extrinsic rewards and not choosing material of genuine interest to them. Croy found that students chose books to read for which she had given book talks even if they were not Accelerated Reading selections. Having heard about a book had a very strong influence on whether students chose a book to read. Her findings convinced her that we should "continue to investigate ways to promote reading for pleasure and not just for points" (Croy, 2002 b, Discussion, para. 6).

Influence of gender on reading choices

Doiron (2003) examines the content of elementary classroom and school libraries and considers gender differences in students' personal or independent reading. Doirin concludes that educators are doing well at presenting and promoting the reading of fiction. His findings show boys read a balance of fiction and information books, but girls read predominantly fiction and need more encouragement to diversify their reading choices.

Dutro (2001) discovers that male fifth grade students became very anxious when faced with the necessity of reading series books they viewed as "girl" books such as *Babysitters Club* and *American Girls*. There is a general tendency for girls to read across gender boundaries although some girls read only books considered highly gendered as female.

Blair and Sanford (1995) have spent years examining gender differences in education. They found girls read fiction more than boys and also read novels with both genders as main characters. When one of the girls in their study was asked to explain why she thought that boys don't read books with both genders as main characters, she replied, "'Well, it's like girls wear both blue jeans and skirts, and boys wear only jeans.' Girls are in her mind, more versatile in their reading than boys" (Blair & Sanford, 1995, p. 52).

Blair and Sanford (2003) have recently focused on boys, male interests in reading and writing, and created a Boys and Literacy website to highlight their research. They state that literacy for boys is a social practice which shapes their identities and helps them to develop and maintain relationships with peers. Boys tend to interact socially over non-fictional texts, magazines, newspapers, Internet sites, and videogames. They choose reading material to help inform their interests and those of their peer group. Their common choices of books are "how to", informational, and fantasy. In contrast, girls' literacy practices align more closely with the narrative texts, types of assignments, and assessment methods traditionally used in schools.

Boys are adapting and reshaping or "morphing" the traditional academic literacy skills they are learning at school to apply to new literacies that appeal to them: sports, computers, video games, and chat rooms. Blair and Sanford (2004) outline five reasons boys read and write: personal interest, action, success, fun, and purpose. Boys also adapt school assignments to suit them better. Boys "are resisting many school-based practices by transforming the assigned literacy work into something more personally fun, engaging, meaningful, humorous, active, and purposeful" (Blair and Sanford, 2004, p. 453). Purchasing fiction resources may meet the needs of female students. However, a resource centre catering to male students must also have an interesting non-fiction section, subscriptions to a variety



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of magazines, and computer access. As examples of newspaper articles from the National Post (Smyth, 2003) and the Globe and Mail (2003) show, the press is calling for rethinking how we teach boys. These articles suggest using more popular culture materials of interest to boys in the classroom.

Shultheis (1990) studied the relationship between genders and reading preferences. She found that boys do not enjoy reading fantasy. She also concludes that both males and females prefer reading about a male protagonist. Johnson & Peer (1984) asked students in grades four to ten about their preferences regarding the main character in stories. Like the Shultheis results, their findings show that both boys and girls prefer a male protagonist. This study showed that boys in lower grades prefer male characters considerably more than girls do. At higher grade levels, female characters were preferred more by girls than by boys. These are controversial findings in light of present trends. Since both studies are becoming dated, this issue calls for a closer look to be undertaken through current research.

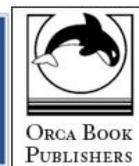
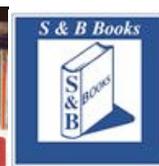
Lewis (1999) states that girls tend to choose books based on suggestions from others and that their choices emphasize character. In contrast, the boys tend to choose by genre and, if considering fiction, look for action with some violence. According to Lewis, girls are learning how to operate in heterosexual relationships, whereas boys are learning about themselves in relation to authority, power and aggression. She feels that "independent reading" and "free choice" are actually misnomers because it is through these activities that students are learning social identities from the surrounding culture. A study from Jamaica by Shelley-Robinson (2001) corroborates these findings.

Sturm (2003) asked two thousand young people between the ages of two and eighteen to express their preference for information while visiting a library. Young people were asked, "What do you want to know more about?" In other words, they were asked to state their areas of interest or their desire for information. This may or may not be the same as what children would choose for pleasure reading. However, Sturm felt that knowing children's interests and preferences would help teachers and child psychologists. As well, libraries could use this information when planning reference services, reader's advisory, programming and marketing. The primary male interests were transportation, sports, and war. The female choices were mainly horses, mystery fiction, romance fiction, and fine arts and crafts.

Strategies for choosing books

Ross & Chelton (2001) studied "heavy" or avid readers. The study reveals five considerations these readers employ for choosing books: the type of reading experience wanted, sources used to find new books, elements of the book, clues on the book itself, and the cost in time and money to access the book. Avid readers, according to Ross (1999), develop a system for choosing books that involves many interrelated considerations: previous experience, knowledge of the book world, and networks for recommending books. Two elements are the mood the reader is in (What do I feel like reading?) and the "cost" in time or money involved for readers to get intellectual or physical access to a particular book. The latter includes:

- intellectual access (previous knowledge of content or of literary conventions needed by the reader to make sense of the text),
- physical access (time and work required before the reader can lay hands on the book itself)
- length of time required or degree of cognitive and emotional commitment required by the book itself (easy quick read vs. long demanding read) (Ross,



1999, para. 5).

There is no indication that the book selection strategies identified generalize to all readers.

Even though the publishing industry has been targeting this age group in recent years, Mackey and Johnston (1996) state that teachers are not knowledgeable enough about young adult fiction. They list ten descriptors to help in finding books for inexperienced and reluctant teenage readers. Included in this list are a gripping opening, a fairly short length, an engaging cover, characters as old as or older than the readers, and a recognizable, contemporary setting. They maintain that students need to be given time to read purely for enjoyment and be shown possible routes to successful book selection. They give fourteen tactics, in descending order of popularity, as:

- following an author
- browsing, talking to a friend
- following a genre
- seeing a book cover
- starting one book in a series
- seeing someone else's reading
- following a topic
- talking to a teacher or librarian
- doing a novel study
- receiving a book as a present
- using a book club list
- working on a school unit such as mythology, poetry, mystery
- finding a title appealing
- forced reading – picking up any book in a hurry if you forgot yours (Mackey and Johnston, 1996, 31).

Choosing for special needs students

Swartz and Hendricks (2000) state that students with special needs, like those in the Learning Disabilities Programs and Developmental Centres, like the same kind of books as other students and should be allowed to choose their own books for pleasure reading. They highlight self-selection and choice as having a positive impact on learning to read and becoming lifelong readers. According to this study, the factors children use to make book selections, topic/subject matter, author, writing style, cover/illustrations, characters, and back-of-the-book summaries, are used by special needs students as well. These students also used the additional strategies of title, length of book, movie/TV adaptations, and a friend's recommendations to help choose books. The researchers suggest teachers implement lessons on how to select a book and warn them not to "dumb down" reading lists for students with special needs (Swartz and Hendricks, 2000, p.10). Their research demonstrates that special needs children want to read the same books as students in regular programs.

Adult choices versus student choices

Hill, White, & Brodie (2001) examine the criteria considered by the selection committees for the Newbery and Caldecott Awards and six other awards programs. They caution that, although teachers and librarians select and promote award



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winning books, the awards are "given based on specific criteria that may or may not always meet the reading needs or appeal of every child" (Hill, White, & Brodie, 2001, p.3). The Saskatchewan Young Readers' Choice Awards website gives their selection policies. Their stated selection criteria make no mention of the characteristics research reports children and young people seek in their recreational reading material. The selection committee does not include any young people although they can suggest books to a committee member before the first meeting. There seems to be no similarity between the criteria for selecting award winning books and what influences students' choice of recreational reading material.

Miller (2004) reports on the choices teachers make of young adult "problem" novels. These novels treat teenage problems such as abuse, suicide, pregnancy, family problems, grief, illness, and death. Although just a partial sampling of young adult books, these books are usually chosen for study by teachers and awarded prizes by committees of adults. She feels this predilection for gloomy, depressing books overlooks the funny, imaginative novels most students prefer.

Agnew (1996) offers her perspective from the publishing and book selling industry. She expresses her opinion that adult perceptions of children's books differ significantly from the children for whom they are buying the books. She has observed that, whereas children look for enjoyment, adults choose books for their educational value and how much they will contribute to children's progress in reading. Agnew states that adults analyze children's books according to criteria they consider important and feel qualified to do this because they were children once themselves. She highlights the need for finding out what influences children's reading selections given the following situation:

Much of the decision-making about what children read is done by adults. Where adults are not actively selecting a particular book for a particular child, they are often at work behind the scenes; classroom book boxes are almost always chosen by adults; libraries and bookshops are stocked by adults; and information about children's books often comes from adult sources (Agnew, 1996, p. 35).

Agnew is skeptical about whether some kind of checklist can be developed for choosing children's books more effectively. She advises adults to listen to children more and value what they say.

Conclusion

This review reinforces the importance of recreational reading and the need for supplying students with what they want to read. The importance of series books, cover illustrations and non-fiction, the influence of gender on reading preferences, the influence of Internet book reviews, the affect of the reader's mood and the effort required by a book must all be considered in developing an appealing collection for students. The criteria adults use for nominating young people's books for awards and for purchasing books for children differ from the ones that students use for choosing books to read. In order to supply materials that students want to read in school libraries, teacher-librarians need to choose books which will meet the self-selected, recreational reading needs of students.

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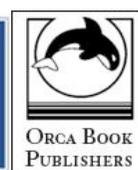
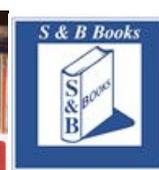
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Avoiding Dead Dogs

Chris Arnstead

Chris Arnstead received her Masters in Education in Teacher-Librarianship at the University of Alberta's June convocation. She has many years experience teaching in elementary schools in Saskatchewan and is beginning her fourth year as a teacher-librarian with Regina Public Schools.

Old Shep, My Pal by Zack Paris is the most boring book I've read in my entire life. I did not have a favorite character. I hated everyone equally. The most interesting part came on the last page where it said "The End". This book couldn't be any lousier if it came with a letter bomb. I would not recommend it to my worst enemy. (Wallace's book report, page 4)

Because the dog always dies. Go to the library and pick out a book with an award sticker and a dog on the cover. Trust me, that dog is going down. (Wallace speaking, page 5) Excerpts from No More Dead Dogs by Gordon Korman:

Do you have books languishing unread on your resource centre shelves? Are students not finding what they want to read in your library? How many copies of *Old Yeller*, *Souder*, and *Where the Red Fern Grows* are crowding the shelves? Perhaps you have too many "dead dog" books and not enough of what students like.

Every teacher-librarian wants to purchase books students enjoy and will read. Budgets are slim; every purchase needs to be well used. Although there are no guarantees that every book chosen will become a favourite, here are some guidelines to consider when selecting, displaying and promoting books for student recreational reading. These recommendations are based on the following findings from interviews with elementary school teacher-librarians and students in grade six.

Boys state their preference for mysteries and novels with sports, adventure, fantasy, and action. Girls prefer mysteries as well as romance, fantasy, science, historical fiction and diaries. Students choose books according to familiar series, authors and genres. They like to read what is recommended to them by family and friends. The cover and back-of-the-book summary has a tremendous influence over whether they will borrow a book.

Teacher-librarians consider certain characteristics when selecting entertaining books for students. They look for a book that is part of a series or by a well liked author. It should have an attractive cover and interesting back-of-the book summary. The plot should move at a quick pace and involve appealing characters, preferably the same age or older than the intended reader. The book shouldn't be too long, the font must be a comfortable size and the print can't be too dense on the page. Teacher-librarians look for favourable reviews or recommendations from others.

- Display books appealingly with their covers shown as much as possible
- Weed books with dated covers and replace with new editions
- Label book spines with eye catching genre stickers



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- Have clear signage of the various sections in the library and group materials in the ways students hunt for books, for example by series.
- Teach strategies for book selection, show students how to hunt for a book that might interest them
- Give frequent book talks to promote books and reading
- Interact with students during book exchange periods
- Facilitate students talking about books to each other
- Involve students in selecting resources, encourage their requests and take them shopping
- Purchase series books and books by popular authors
- Stock libraries with a variety of materials, include pop culture, magazines, graphic novels and new literacies
- Choose books according to the characteristics students consider important
- Know students' interests and tastes
- Encourage all students to read both fiction and non-fiction
- Ask colleagues for recommendations of what materials are popular in their libraries
- Consult reviews of materials in professional journals and reviews by students like on the *Wired for Words* website

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Reaching Struggling Readers in the Intermediate Grades with Books they Can and Want to Read

Lori Jamison Rog and Paul Kropp

Lori Jamison Rog has been the Language Arts Consultant for the Regina Public Schools in Regina, Saskatchewan and author of *Early Literacy Instruction in Kindergarten (IRA)*, *Guided Reading Basics (Pembroke)* and, with Paul Kropp, *The Write Genre (Pembroke)*. Paul Kropp is the author of many hi/lo novels in the *New Series Canada (High Interest Publishing)* and *How to Make Your Child a Reader for Life (Random House)*. He taught for many years in Hamilton and Toronto, Ontario.

Charles is a struggling reader. Like three out of four children with reading difficulties, Charles is a boy. He started school with limited experience with print, struggled through activities with letters and sounds, and tended to be "off task" when there was independent reading time. He learned in second grade to have his reading buddy do most of the reading. By third grade, when most of his classmates were fairly fluent, Charles was still guessing at words, using picture clues and avoiding books whenever he could. In fourth grade, when the illustrations were gone, Charles was in obvious trouble.

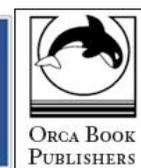
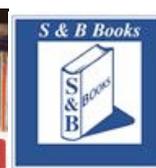
There are few tasks more challenging for teachers than reaching struggling middle school readers like Charles. These students not only have a history of reading failure, they have developed attitudes and coping strategies that lead them to avoid, rather than fix, the problem. The intermediate grades will often be these students' last chance for reading success. The longer they wait, the more difficult it will be to address the problem.

We believe there are two keys in helping Charles and his peers develop the skill and will to become effective readers: choosing the right reading materials and engaging the students in meaningful learning activities which build strategic independence. If this were as easy as it sounds, virtually every student would experience reading success before leaving elementary school. Unfortunately, it's not.

Like many struggling readers, Charles has problems that can be diagnosed. His attention span is short. He doesn't have flexible reading strategies – if sounding out doesn't work quickly, he'll guess or read blithely on. He doesn't monitor his own comprehension, trudging on even if the text is making no sense to him. Nonetheless, he knows that reading is important and he wants to read well. He knows that the jobs in his future will require reading. He even knows that there is a great delight to be had in stories and books, but that delight is simply beyond his reach.

As teachers, our job is to extend that reach.

There is extensive research to support the premise that the best way to become a better reader is to read more. (Allington, 2001). Unfortunately, the instructional solution for readers like Charles often is to focus on isolated subskills rather than the reading process as a whole. As a result, he usually ends up reading less than his classmates, thereby having fewer opportunities to build competence, a phenomenon Keith Stanovich calls "The Matthew Effect" (Stanovich, 1994).



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If Charles is to increase both the quantity and quality of his reading, he needs reading materials that are easy for him to read and connect to his personal interests. For struggling readers, successful fiction choices will be those that are "cool," that involve action-adventure or teenage problems. For boys especially, non-fiction has considerable appeal, particularly when titles can be found that match their interests and hobbies. While a capable reader likely has a wide range of reading interests, struggling readers are more narrowly focused both in terms of interest and ability. The "right" book becomes essential to get reading going.

The term "high interest, low vocabulary" is often used to describe books for children like Charles. These are materials with controlled vocabulary and reading difficulty levels, but with plots and topics appropriate to older students. Such books avoid the problems of having Charles, at age 11, reading a picture book about teddy bears or butterflies. Unfortunately, not all books claiming to be "hi/lo" are properly designed for struggling readers.

Effective hi/lo materials should always be developed with attention to measured readability levels. Typical readability formulae, such as the Fry and the Flesch-Kincaid offered with Microsoft Word, are based on sentence length and syllable count. More sophisticated formulae such as the Dale-Chall, Harris-Jacobsen and the Lexile system use three factors: sentence length, syllable count and word difficulty. The basic idea is that longer sentences, polysyllabic words and abstruse vocabulary make it more difficult for readers to decode text. (Zakaluk and Samuels, 1988) To an extent, this is true.

Unfortunately, the nature of any formula makes it possible to artificially lower the measured readability of text by simply chopping sentences into pieces or substituting monosyllabic vocabulary. Consider this highly stilted text from the hi/lo novel *One in a Million*:

At last I found the nerve to ask Nina if I could take some pictures of her. To my surprise she smiled and said yes. She stayed behind in the studio to model for me. I took some photos of her sitting in a chair. They came out really well.

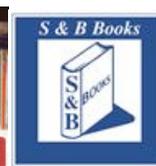
"They're good," she said. "I like them very much."

"I really want to take some out of doors," I said. "Using natural light, maybe in the park."

(from Iris Howden, *One in a Million*, Jamestown Publishers, 1998)

The sentences are choppy and awkward. This choppiness yields a measured reading level below grade 3, but technical vocabulary pertaining to photography throughout this book is clearly beyond what a student at that level could handle. Such inconsistencies are often found in materials that claim to be high-interest, low vocabulary.

Effective materials for struggling readers have their own textual integrity: realistic characters, readable and convincing text and a deep sense of the readers' interests and needs. Consistency is important. A text whose readability runs from grade 2 to grade 8 may still have an average readability of grade 4, but many sections will be too difficult for a reluctant reader. As well, writers of controlled-readability materials



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must be aware that the interest of a book must be sustained throughout. Authors of regular novels can spend more time describing characters and settings; authors of good high interest, low vocabulary books know that it's important to keep the plot spinning.

Again, not all hi/lo materials meet these criteria. Consider this passage from a novel in the Woodland Mystery series:

Mrs. Tandy said, "Well, I have a plan you'll like, I think. Let's make sandwiches for lunch, and have a picnic!"

Sammy said, "Perfect! First the snack, then ATTACK!"

Kathy said, "Let's put the sandwiches into paper bags. Then we can use the bags for picking plums later."

Mrs. Tandy said, "Here's cold turkey and home-baked ham, and lettuce, and bread."

(from Irene Schultz, *The Mystery of the Dark Old House* (a Woodland Mystery), Wright Group, 1996.)

The sentences are short, the polysyllabic words few and the difficult vocabulary virtually non-existent. Measured readability is slightly over grade 3. But is this high interest? How did this picnic episode – which continues down an entire page – make its way into a mystery novel? Let's contrast with a selection from another hi/lo novel:

The two wrestlers came together, a mass of arms and knees. Tom kept trying to throw Peter to the mat, but Peter kept slipping free. At last Peter saw his chance. He ducked and got his head under Tom's shoulder. Then fast – fast as anything – he flipped around behind Tom's back. The older boy was forced down to the mat.

"Peter, one point," the coach yelled.

(from Paul Kropp, *Head Lock* (Series Canada, 1986)

The technical readability of this section is below grade 3, but the subject matter and rhythm of the prose keep the story moving and the reader engrossed. Ultimately, this is the test of effective hi/lo fiction.

Sophisticated genres like the mystery or chopped-down "classics" are inappropriate in programs for struggling readers. Think about all of the reading strategies required to enjoy a mystery novel: a reader must be able to read for detail, recall a series of clues, make inferences and connections within the text and sustain interest until the end of the book when the mystery is resolved – all the things in which struggling readers are weakest. Similarly, classic novels that have been adapted for weaker readers still retain the complex plot twists and heavy concept load of the original text. Reading *Huckleberry Finn* remains difficult even if Twain's rich vocabulary and syntax are stripped from the novel.

Obviously, readability formulae are not enough to ensure that texts will be accessible to struggling readers. The best materials for struggling readers are carefully written, edited and designed to provide supports for struggling readers. These supports include:



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- a compelling storyline and credible characters
- supportive formatting that includes illustrations and appropriate text placement on the page
- careful introduction and reinforcement of difficult vocabulary and concepts
- straightforward plot and sentence structure
- topics and issues with which readers can make personal or emotional connections

Effective characterization is the key to good narrative text. Readers need to care what happens to the characters and how their problems will be resolved in the story. This is particularly important for reluctant readers. Novels for struggling readers need clearly defined and differentiated characters. This does not require a lot of description; it does require that the characters are clearly distinguishable from one another. In *Series Canada*, for example, even the characters' names were made visually different from one another to avoid confusion on the part of the reader.

Good hi-low reading materials contain plenty of illustrations, the more the better. Not only do illustrations support the storyline, they also "pad" the text, so that the book appears longer but can still be read quickly. The space between lines is wider and words are not broken at the end of lines, in order to facilitate return eye sweep and avoid impediments to fluency. For similar reasons, unfamiliar vocabulary should be supported by an explanation, and repeated at least once in the text to reinforce its importance and meaning.

Sophisticated literary devices such as flashbacks, sudden plot twists or complex subplots increase the difficulty of reading for struggling readers. Story structure should be straightforward and move the reader through the text quickly and efficiently. Are there sacrifices here in the depth and complexity of the novel? Of course. But the goal here is reading and enjoyment; serious literary study can wait for other novels later on.

Making connections from one's own experience to the text is an important strategy. It is important that students be able to relate to the topics and issues in the books they read. Actually, much of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has a lower measured readability than the newspaper sports page. Teachers know, however, that students will have difficulty relating to the situations and language in *Hamlet* without significant teacher assistance; most can handle the sports page with ease.

Finally, the appearance of hi/lo material is vitally important for middle grade students, especially boys, whose self-esteem is often not that strong. Such books should not appear obviously "special" or have their reading levels marked. In fact, the best hi/lo books should have as much appeal for good readers as they do for struggling readers.

Although providing students with accessible books will go a long way toward helping them develop the skill and will to read, we cannot assume that appropriate materials alone will create proficient readers. It is essential that teachers provide explicit instruction in comprehension strategies (National Reading Panel, 2000) and many opportunities to practice those strategies in meaningful, authentic reading contexts.

We know that efficient readers constantly monitor their own comprehension, stopping at points of confusion and applying fix-up strategies to repair the problem.



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Inefficient readers often do not even realize they do not comprehend what they read, or do not recognize the point at which they stopped comprehending. Providing comprehension questions *after* reading merely measures comprehension after the fact. We believe that real reading work is done *during*, not after, reading. Teachers must help struggling readers to pay attention to what they read and constantly ask themselves, "Does this make sense?" and "How can I make it make sense?" Two effective techniques for helping students build these skills are think-alouds and coding.

During a think-aloud, the reader articulates what is going on in her mind as she reads. As you conduct a read-aloud or shared reading session, pause regularly to talk about your thinking. For example, as you read, you might talk about personal connections that you make to the text, places that confuse you, or how you need to go back to reread a portion of the text. Reading is mostly an "in-the-head" process. Think-alouds enable the teacher to demonstrate those internal processes to developing readers, then to encourage students to articulate those processes as well (Oster, 2001). Teachers start by modeling the process with a shared text. Then they provide students with a piece of text that is marked with places to stop and "think-aloud". Next, students are invited to stop at these strategic points and share with a reading partner or the reading group what they are thinking at that time. Gradually students are encouraged to internalize the think-aloud process.

Another strategy for teaching students to monitor their own understanding is coding. Each student will need a package of post-it notes with which to mark passages in the text. Teachers work with students to develop appropriate codes. Sometimes a simple question mark is a good place to start. Have them read a portion of text, tabbing all points of confusion or misunderstanding with a "?" (Some teachers call this the "Huh?" code!) Depending on the nature of the text, other codes may be added later, such as:

- I already knew this.
- This is new to me.
- This is really interesting!

Coding is a "during reading" technique that forces readers to focus on what they are reading and how it relates to their existing knowledge. Of course, if you want it to be truly effective, use the "after reading" discussion to revisit the coded text and address interesting points and points of confusion.

By modeling a reading strategy, then providing students with opportunities to practice it using texts at their instructional levels, we lay the groundwork for students to use the strategy when they read independently. This means that teachers need to ensure that students have opportunities to choose books for themselves and time to read them independently.

Ultimately, children choose books to read for themselves for about the same reasons that adults do. A survey of adults indicated (Canadian Book and Periodical Council, 1998) these factors for people who bought a book at the bookstore. The question was "why did you choose this book?" The answers, in order:



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- Recommendation by friends (peers)
- Interest in the topic or story
- Interest in the author
- Cover and back-cover blurb
- Display
- TV tie-in or promotion

Our students are motivated by these factors as well, and a good teacher can use these to promote titles to all her students. A classroom "bestseller" list or book recommendations by students themselves are good places to begin. Author studies such as Jerry Spinelli or S.E. Hinton often work well because these authors have created works at a number of readability levels so that *all* students can be engaged in the authors' different novels.

For many students, deriving pleasure and information from reading is a natural experience. For students like Charles, we need special interventions to help them make that link. These interventions include making the right book available at the right time with the right supports. In this way, we can help Charles develop the skill and the will to become a reader for life.

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Writing Back: Authors affirming the next generation of writers

David Ward

"Dear author: I read your story...now could you read mine?"

As a Canadian children's author I am in correspondence with young writers on a regular basis. Responding to e-mails and letters I receive from students has become a feature of my writing life. While many of these children write to express appreciation for one of my stories as *readers*, there is a growing number of others searching for support as the next generation of young *writers*.

Librarians and teachers have long known that author interactions with children can promote literacy (Vos, 2003; Kline & Grimes, 2002). Author visits and workshops at libraries and schools are the most frequent form of interaction currently used in education. And yet, hidden from the curriculum and educational initiatives, a silent correspondence, a wealth of educational assessment, has been carrying on for years between authors and students.

I first stumbled across *C.S. Lewis: Letters to Children* (Dorsett & Mead, 1985) a year ago. As a Narnian fan I could not resist taking a look at what an author, who had greatly impacted me as a reader and writer, had to say to a young readership. After only a few pages I was astonished at both the volume of letters Lewis received as well as the remarkable resemblance to my own correspondence with students. The same categories of questions and observations Lewis responded to in the 1950's and 1960's are the very ones I enjoy forty years later.

How old are you? Do you have a cat? Are you tall?

In 1954 the famous author of, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* answered a group of fifth graders:

"I'm tall, fat, rather bald, red-faced, double-chinned, black-haired, have a deep voice, and wear glasses for reading," (p. 45).

Lewis's response was a pleasant reminder of all the different questions I have been asked over the years. Most letters I have received however, demonstrate a deep, personal connection to the stories they have read and are filled with the kind of observations that make an author want to pause.

Why did the mother have to die? I didn't like that part.

I see myself the most in Coriko...I think like him...he does exactly what I would have done in his place.

Still others want to know about writing, in particular, their own writing.

I have created a race. I know where they live and everything but I can't think of a name. Can you tell me how to find a good name?



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While it was encouraging to see the similarities between my favorite children's author and my own correspondences with readers I still did not know if other, living authors were experiencing the same phenomenon. Recently, I discovered an article from Publishers Weekly (1998) about children's authors and letters from their fans. Many of the writers mentioned were receiving thousands of letters each year. What caught my attention immediately was that some of these renowned authors including, Jon Scieszka, Robert Cormier, Gary Paulsen and Ann Martin, were writing back to their inquirers! Gary Paulsen, the article notes, often spends two hours a day writing to his readership (Rosen, 1998). Clearly there was a phenomenon occurring here that needed investigating.

Over the next few months I began to retrace my e-mail dialogues with readers and dug out the letters and pictures students had sent over the years. While my original responses to children via post have been lost, I still have a number of "second responses" – where children have answered my letters. I have also begun to photocopy my correspondence before I send them in order to record the journey young writers and authors are taking together.

My next step was to poll my Canadian writing colleagues. I entered a doctoral program at the University of British Columbia and began to interview Canadian authors, asking them about their interactions with students. Their responses have opened a treasure box of educational information on students' perceptions of writing and reading. I have touched on a few key categories below to provide a sense of what is happening in this silent dialogue between writers and students and to encourage librarians in their efforts to promote literacy through author interactions with young people.

1. Correspondence affirms readers as writers

Students whose writing abilities span the spectrum have sent me anecdotes, poems, and entire manuscripts of their writing. What resonates with me the most clearly when I read their attachments or tiny notes hand-scrawled at the top of a story is that we share a common fear: editors.

I know the ending doesn't sound like it should finish here, but...

Please forgive all my descriptive words, I just can't help it...

I sure wish I could draw, 'cause I can't explain it very well.

As writers, the words we put on the page are somehow an extension of ourselves and when they are laid out for others to see we feel exposed, examined by x-ray eyes. All of my manuscripts are sent with qualifiers. I am sure my editor has long stopped reading my apologetics and jumps straight to the start of the story.

My first purpose as a mentor is to affirm the student as a writer. Many times, I will begin a response to a reader with something like:

"What an amazing world you have created!"

Looking back, I noticed that Lewis had done the same thing. In 1954 he wrote: "Your story, Martin, is good, and keeps one right to the end guessing what is really



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happening." (1985, 40).

How can we know if this kind of affirmation is effective in encouraging young writers to write? The greatest statistic for me is that without a single acceptance, every child whose story or poem I have read and affirmed has written back, always with changes or extensions to their work. A careful read through Lewis's letters will show the same. Writing is an exceedingly personal, human activity that begs for confirmation. Young writers, more than anyone, need to know that what they doing as wordsmiths, is the same, in practice, as those whose names are filling the bookshelves. In time, many of them will be writing articles for newspapers, journals, business reports and some, will be tantalizing our grandchildren with, "Once upon a time..."

2. Correspondence as co-participants in a reading event

The first reader of any written work is the author. I read what I write as I write it. In this sense, when students connect with one of my stories I can affirm their thoughts as a fellow reader, a co-participant. I have often wondered what my own musings must sound like from outside my office door during my writing times. A carefully placed ear would likely catch snickers, guffaws, deep sighs, and on occasion, exclamatory colorful metaphors. There are parts of my stories that I relive, think about, not as my creation, but as characters that exist and act on their world. I have even "teared-up" at the loss of a character. How can this be when I am the writer? It is because the act of reading and writing are so closely knitted that as the first reader I can participate in the reading with any who follow. Lewis put it this way:

It is always nice to hear of anyone really enjoying *Perelandria* [Lewis's second book in a space trilogy]. I don't think the pleasure on my part is merely vanity. I enjoyed that imaginary world so much myself that I'm glad to find anyone who has been there and liked it as much as I did – just like meeting someone who has been to a place one knows and likes in the real world (p. 78).

When authors affirm children's thoughts and personal reflections on a story as valid (to be distinguished from, *correct*) they encourage students' self esteem as readers. I encourage students to read quality literature in almost every letter I write. As educators we recognize the benefits of word-enhancing, imaginative, exemplary writing and we want the students in our classrooms and libraries to be exposed to as much of it as they can handle.

3. Correspondence through the "writing crossroads"

Frequently, students who write to me request help with their poems and stories. As a member of several writing organizations I have been present at formal and informal meetings where experienced writers have expressed frustration and the need for support with a particular manuscript. We all suffer from writer's block. I remember walking with a friend along a university street some years ago, lamenting an incomplete, *Awakening Grassland*. "It's not going anywhere," I groaned. "No one is going to like this." My friend, a writer and poet, took my shoulder and responded, "You better finish it! Go back to where you started. Remember the mood that birthed this project and rekindle the magic. I've read eight chapters and I want to see what's going to happen next. If you don't write it for publication, then at least write it for me!"



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Only a few months later, a senior editor emailed my agent to inform me of a contract. *Escape the Mask* (2001, Scholastic Canada) the published version of *Awakening Grassland*, hit the shelves in July of 2001. We all need support as writers and authors can be an extraordinary resource and inspiration for students. Sometimes all it takes is a little direction in the right place and the project comes back to life.

A few suggests in conclusion

Authors are busy people. We cannot always provide the kind of feedback that young writers are hoping for. However, may I suggest that this is precisely where we need the guidance of librarians, teacher-librarians and teachers? As you encourage students to seek help from authors with their writing or you are promoting literacy through author visits at your library or school, you could give them the following advice:

- Keep your e-mails and letters to authors, brief, 1-2 paragraphs at the most.
- Send the best sample of your writing (3-4 sentences). It might not seem like much, but writers will get a taste of what you are doing, much like reading the start of a novel.
- Ask specific questions with background information: "My story is about a dog who visits Mars. I like my character and don't want the story to end. But I can't think of a good ending. Do you keep your endings open for a sequel or should I finish it all in one book?"
- Visit the author's website before writing a letter. A website often contains frequently asked questions that will direct common questions to possible answers.
- Remind students that responses may take a while and they will likely be brief. If an author does not respond, it does not mean she is not interested. It likely means she is so busy that she cannot answer. Don't give up. Try again later, or, try a different author.
- If an author responds to you, share it with your class, teacher or librarian. Public responses can be posted and an "author-talks" board can be created.
- It is always nice to receive a, thank-you, after I have written back to a student.
- Seek out authors whose voice and style are similar to your own. If you have not found your voice yet...you may find that it patterns the very authors you like the most.

Children's authors are one of the greatest un-tapped resources in literacy education. While they cannot provide the consistency of teaching that a classroom teacher or librarian can give, they remain inspirational, direct participants as co-educators for a new generation of young writers.

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Willow Whispers from Saskatchewan

Liz Roberts

Liz Roberts wrote her Masters of Education thesis on censorship in school libraries. Although now retired, she worked as a teacher, teacher-librarian, and in-school administrator in rural Saskatchewan. She was president of the Saskatchewan School Libraries Association and secretary for the Saskatchewan Young Readers' Choice Awards. She now serves as a director of that organization.

Each spring, all across Canada, there is a flurry of activity as young people in schools, public libraries and community centres head to the polls. These polls have nothing to do with politics and everything to do with a group of awards referred to affectionately, by people in the Canadian publishing industry, as "the tree awards". Whether it's the Hackmatack awards in the Atlantic provinces, the Silver Birch in Ontario or the Red Cedar in B.C., children are actively involved in selecting what they perceive to be the best works in Canadian Literature from lists of prestigious nominees. Without exception, the tree awards have in common two objectives: to encourage young people to read, and to promote the cream of Canadian Children's Literature. Saskatchewan students make their selections by voting for the Willow Awards.

'The Willows' are a product of the Saskatchewan Young Readers' Choice Awards Inc., a non-profit group established in 2001 by a group of school and public librarians -- all volunteers, and all committed to promoting reading. While other jurisdictions generally began with only one award for students in the grade four to six range, Saskatchewan jumped in with both feet, establishing three awards from its very inception. The plan was to provide an all-inclusive program for children of all ages. Three awards are given each year to the authors of the books students deem to be the best in three categories. The Shining Willow Award is determined by beginning readers who may read the books themselves, or have them read to them. The Diamond Willow category is voted on by competent readers, and the Snow Willow Award is decided on by accomplished readers.

Each year, students organize and carry out two major events. The first is the annual media launch of the new lists. The launch is held in October, sandwiched between Saskatchewan Education Week and Saskatchewan Library Week. Each spring, the call for hosts is issued and proposals are submitted to the SYRCA Board. The venue for the media launch is generally a rural school and the plans for hosting are elaborate. Children introduce the books to their school community and to the public in a number of interesting ways. In the past, launches have included book fairs, readers' theatre presentations, displays, poems, power point presentations and many other creative introductions. The whole school becomes involved in one way or another. The media launch says to students all across the province, "Let the reading begin!" In small towns and large urban centres, the launch is the signal for children to begin the search for the titles listed as nominees for the year.

In February, voting takes place. The ballots are sent to the SYRCA Board and the results are tallied. The results remain a well-guarded secret until the day of the Gala. A school in a larger urban centre is selected to host the annual SaskEnergy



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Willow Awards Gala where seating is at a premium. Participating voters from all over the province are invited to attend. The winning authors are also part of the Gala, and during their stay, they give readings to classes in the host school. At the ceremonies, the tension mounts as the nominees are introduced and finally, to the cheers of hundreds of supporters, the winners are announced. The award is a glass replica of a willow tree. Beneath its protective branches, a child is sitting reading. It was designed and produced by Saskatchewan artist Jacqueline Berting.

Of course these events are the highlight of a 'Willow' year, and through them children learn leadership skills and develop a number of competencies: from public speaking to computer programming, from artwork to musical and written compositions. In Saskatchewan, they have even had to become familiar with the world of protocol since Her Honour Lieutenant-Governor Lynda Haverstock has attended two of our first three celebrations. But what is happening in between these high-energy activities that makes the Willow Awards worthwhile? Why should we bother to promote the Willows in our schools and libraries? After all, the curriculum is full to overflowing already, and each school day is crammed with fulfilling children's needs. As for public libraries, there are more than enough new ideas to try without adding this program.

The Willows are special. To begin with, they belong to the students. They allow children to read at their own level. Because no grade levels are attached to the reading lists, a child may pick up books at any level and vote at that level once he or she has read the required number of books for the specific category. The individual student's opinion counts.

The Willows also provide topics for a great deal of literature talk. If you eavesdrop in a class or reading group where students are reading these books, you will often overhear heated critical discussions about the characters created by various authors; the plausibility of the plots; the author's effective use of description; and the devices used to create mood, atmosphere and suspense. Students heatedly defend their choice of certain genres and they definitely promote their selection for the winning book and author. The level of sophistication in the discussions is amazing.

In general, the 'tree awards' empower children. When readers vote, publishers listen. After all, a nomination to the shortlist for a tree award can result in a print run of many thousands of books in Ontario or 1,000 books in Saskatchewan. Publishers know that not only will their books sell in the province in which they are nominated, they'll be grabbed up by readers in neighbouring provinces and states. Librarians and booksellers across the country are aware of which books were nominated and which were winners. The benefits that accrue to authors and illustrators from having a book nominated are also substantial due to the increase in royalties they receive from the increased sales. Although the quality of writing in a manuscript has more influence than its topic on whether or not it will be published, publishers can predict reading trends among young people from the books that are nominated. However, publishers state categorically that the gratification provided by the accolades that the publishers, authors and illustrators receive from the children is greater than any economic impact the "tree awards" might have.

Young readers are also empowered in more than one way. Through their interactions with the Willow Awards Program, they develop independence and a sense of responsibility. They learn about the power of a democratic vote and understand the decision-making process. By working on the projects in the education kits developed by SYRCA, they recognize the importance of independent work and of



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selecting activities that match their innate talents. They connect reading with 'having fun', rather than 'doing work'. Reading becomes an activity for recreation, not just education.

The Willow Awards showcase the talents of both authors and illustrators. Students develop an appreciation of both writing and interpretation through art.. Their understanding of the creative process begins to include the concepts of research and editing as innate components of authorship. As they interact with authors online using links provided in the education packages, or in person during author visits to their schools or public libraries, they develop a clearer picture of what becoming an author entails. In addition, they begin to look at the work of illustrators from a different perspective. As the variety of media illustrators use is pointed out to them, and as they begin to experiment with them on their own, they come to understand the degree of talent required to produce a book. It is through programs such as the Willows that children also learn to recognize voice. They intuitively know that a number of voices are present in the books they read. There is the voice that expresses a single author's opinions and feelings; the voice of a specific region of the country; the voice of their own province or country; and the voice of the entire body of Canadian children's literature.

There are also several side benefits to the Willow Awards that accrue to Saskatchewan schools and public libraries. For example, where else would you find a readily available, easy-to-use program for children involving good quality books? The selection has been done. There are curriculum-related activities planned that revolve around the books. In rural areas of the province where school and public libraries are often staffed with untrained library aides, the program is viewed as a gift. It provides overworked teachers, often teaching out of their field of expertise, with ideas for such things as literature circles, discussion topics, and debatable issues. There are independent activities to accompany every book. To top things off, there is an opportunity to bring authors into otherwise isolated libraries or classrooms to interact with the students and validate the importance of Canadian literature.

The Willow Awards have not been without their growing pains. As with any new organization or program, it is often difficult to become known province-wide. Getting the word out to schools and libraries and, becoming recognized by the media involves hard work. Garnering the support of funding bodies is even more difficult. Early in its development, SYRCA Board members decided the Willow Award Program should not cost students a cent. To accomplish this goal, funds are raised through the donations of members, business patrons and government bodies. SYRCA has been fortunate in finding a number of supporters, but maintaining financial stability in order to retain its "free program" status is an ongoing challenge. To date the Saskatchewan Young Readers' Choice Awards, better known as 'The Willows', remains an evolving, growing, vibrant, volunteer-based organization focusing on children and children's literature. With that combination, surely continued success is not just a dream but a certainty.



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Avid Readership: 'Wired for Words' On-line Youth Book Club

Linda Shantz-Keresztes

Linda Shantz-Keresztes is currently an AISI Teacher-Librarian Consultant with the Calgary Board of Education. She works with a team of five teacher-librarian consultants in an Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AIS I) project, "Revitalizing School Libraries: Building information Literate Learning Communities." Linda has been a classroom teacher, K-12 Teacher-Librarian, Curriculum Leader, and Library Specialist for over 29 years. She is the past-president (2004-05) of the Learning Resources Council of the Alberta Teachers Association. For more information on the 'Wired for Words' site contact Linda at ljshantzkere@cbe.ab.ca.

Welcome to another "In Conversation" session with an outstanding group of "Wired for Words" teacher-librarians from the Calgary Board of Education. This discussion follows two earlier "In Conversation" articles for this journal titled, "Students as Internet Users in School Libraries" (Vol.20, No.2, 2000) and "School Library Collections: From here to eternity" (Vol.21, No.4, 2001). This time around, the talk focuses on the role of teacher-librarians as reading advisors for young people.

Thanks to the following Calgary Board of Education teacher-librarians who took part in this dialogue: *Pat Farley* (Hillhurst Elementary), *Irene Masciuch* (Cappy Smart Elementary), *Linda Steen* (Hawkwood Elementary), *Jacque Vincent* (Ernest Morrow Junior High). Interview facilitated by *Linda Shantz-Keresztes*, Teacher-Librarian Consultant (Alberta Initiative for School Improvement, Curriculum Support Services).

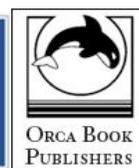
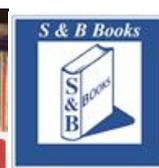
LS-K: *Let's start with some heart-to-heart reflections on your roles as reading advisors for your schools' reading community.*

IM: It isn't just finding a book of interest for a particular reader. It is also about meeting the specific needs of various students whether they are gifted, or are having reading difficulties or are learning English as a second language. It is advising the school community as to what books are available and the right of readers to choose what they want to read.

PF: It is a wonderful relationship a teacher-librarian has with the community. This includes parents, kids, teachers and they all trust your judgment on good books.

LS: I think it is the best part of the job, because you can have a major impact on a student's learning career. It sometimes just takes that one book to turn a reluctant reader into an avid reader. Just one book!

PF: I do book talks around different questions that come from curriculum studies, such as, "How does landscape shape identity?" for kids and it is really professional development for staff as they become familiar with the titles. I generate many bibliographies for staff as well.



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LS: We as teacher-librarians have the unique position that when a child comes to the library looking for reading assistance we can treat him or her as an individual, not by the child's grade level or learning label. There are no preconceived notions. You work with the individual child, from his needs, and his perceived abilities, not yours. Talking about children's choice, I always inform parents that I will provide guidance, but it is the child's choice what he reads. I think this is really important. Children have a variety of reasons for choosing their reading material and it's important to uphold our policy of intellectual freedom. If we don't do that, who will?

IM: We do more than just choosing reading material. We are teaching them to make choices and live with their choices.

JV: Reading is a survival skill. Being able to offer books that connect students to other people, other times, and other places, opens the experiences of our civilization for them. When students who have not had many reading experiences begin to choose and read books that we have recommended to them, and enjoy those books, and come back for more, we know that we have made a significant change for the positive in those students.

PF: A parent will come in and say, "My child isn't bringing home books," and by the end the parent is taking home an armful of books. So we are educating our parents as well as our students. You can just open the world up for kids. Kids who have only read science fiction or other genre and then through a book talk you are able to steer them into a different reading direction. You can highlight Canadian literature or science fiction that they might never have read before.

LS: It is the most rewarding part of the job, matching the right book up with the right kid.

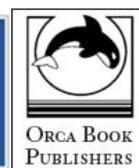
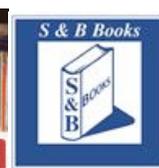
PF: I have some kids in my school, who say, "Have you read this?" One child brought in a kid's book on entrepreneurship and I said, "No. I haven't read it." It was a great conversation about literature with him showing me a kid's book on entrepreneurship. Or another kid brought in a book from the series by Tamora Pierce and told me I needed it for the library.

LS: Kids also bring in books that they want me to put in our library. I had a student bring in *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*, and I asked her if it was appropriate for an elementary school. She wasn't too sure but thought maybe. She understood that I would have to read it myself before I would put it into our library and she would not be upset by my decision. I value that.

PF: I had a grade six student who had a book choice that wasn't for everyone. Students understand the importance of choosing appropriate quality material for a school library. Kids ask, "Do you have *The Babysitters Club*?" and I have to be able to justify our library choices.

PF: I also direct students to websites on good books, like *Wired for Words*, or other book sites that list award winners to help them with their selection of a good book.

LS: The bottom line is kids like to have a conversation. They love to talk about their books online, like the *Wired for Words*, or having an actual person there at the school. They love to talk to each other, too.



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LS-K: *What are the current reading habits of young people that you are noticing in your roles as teacher-librarians?*

PF: Everyone wants to read fantasy!

IM: Yes, it is really big with the boys. It really draws them in. Anything that you promote in a book talk and make interesting, they will dive in and try.

PF: It causes some angst because younger kids want to read the *The Lord of the Rings*.

LS: Thank goodness for the *Deltora* series by Emily Rodda and the *Rhona Wynn* series. They are similar in story line and much easier to read

PF: Also the *Guardians of Ga'Hoole* by Lasky or *The Keepers* by Koller.

JV: Older students of all reading levels love fantasy, especially anything with dragons. They also love non-fiction, particularly those books that are lavishly illustrated and chunk their information. Sports, vehicles, ancient times, disasters are all topics that interest secondary kids. Graphic novels are a genre of growing popularity. The illustrations really connect with many readers irrespective of their reading level.

IM: Graphic novels are a big hit. Kids understand the format.

IM: I find the format of the graphic novel makes books more accessible to some readers, such as the classics novels like *Red Badge of Courage*. They will find the graphic novels and read them.

PF: *Captain Underpants* is the only graphic novel format I might have. It is the perfect fit for grades two and three boys.

IM: You still need to bring in books that suit the kids humour ... bathroom humour.

IM: Children are more appreciative of the art form in picture books. They will gravitate to different books and appreciate the different art forms that go into books.

LS: We have a lot of older children who are reading more picture books, because they are promoted in every classroom, every subject area, every grade level. So they aren't leaving picture books behind.

LSK: I found many of my senior high girls loved mystery books, especially where there was forensic medicine involved. I think many of our teen readers are influenced by popular television series. They love the technical details of solving a case. *One for the Money* by Janet Evanovich was highlighted as popular with teen readers by several of our senior high teacher librarians. They also said students enjoy reading science fiction, fantasy and realistic fiction as well.



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IM: We have a "Read Around the Library Program." They have to read twenty books from different areas in the library and in different genres. Because of the program they pick up books that they would have never read otherwise, and they want the party at the end when they have finished reading the twenty books. Once they are hooked into reading, it just continues on from there. They have a little contest between the classes and many kids are reading books that they would never read before. Some of them are on their fourth sheet and have read eighty books. Many of these are the boys.

LS: Some kids like the competition. Our classroom teachers use "READO" which is like "BINGO." They read different types of books and there is a reward for completing a certain number of "reados." I used to use a "Passport to the Library" and when they explored the different sections of the non-fiction area they got a stamp in their passport book. This helped them to know the different sections of the Dewey Decimal System.

LS-K: *What is "cool" and "not cool" in the reading habits of young and adolescent readers?*

PF: Kids really likes series. They can get their reading teeth into a good series.

JV: In my junior high school, a really good example of that is *A Series of Unfortunate Events*. When the first books were published, they circulated by word of mouth, then cooled. Two of our reading literacy teachers used the first three stories in class and then took the kids to see the film. The kids were disappointed because the film missed so much of what appealed to them in the books. But many of those students borrowed all the books in the series to read from our library. Harry Potter remains cool, and hotly anticipated.

LSK: Series titles are also found to be very popular with senior high students. The *Artemis Fowl* series was even mentioned by several senior high teacher-librarians as being popular with older teens.

IM: J. K Rowling has had a huge impact on making reading "cool." It is cool to carry around a book.

PF: There's a big phenomenon between movies and children's literature. Look at how many movies are based on kids' literature. Even little ones, like those in kindergarten, will see classics that they will read all of their lives and say, "Oh, I have the movie of that book." And so there is this link between movies and the wonderful stories which are made into movies. It is a lovely connection.

LS: I think the connection between literature and the movie industry has affected the publishing industry. Some children's books are written to be made into movies. Not that I think that it is necessarily a bad thing, but those books sometimes lose their literary focus.

IM: Old-fashioned text with accents and difficult quotes will sometimes make something not cool, even though it might be a great story. I can't think a whole lot about what is not cool, other than old titles that should be discarded. Stories that are out-dated, turn off readers and libraries that are not able to keep their collections current are losing readership. When I start bringing in new books, they



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fly off the shelves. If you want the kids to read a book, you need to promote that author or book.

PF: Reading is cool these days for kids. I think of the thick books that you would think kids would not want to tote around in their backpacks, but they are worn and they want to read them.

IM: That is so true. Having just a library will not do it, particularly if they also don't have a teacher-librarian, or someone knowledgeable about literature for kids.

PF: Poetry is still not cool in my library, but yet books that are written in poetic form are read a lot; like *Locomotion* by Jacqueline Woodson, *Love that Dog* by Sharon Creech, and Karen Hesse's *Out of the Dust*. They are actually reading poetry.

LS: Except for Shel Silverstein and Jack Prelutsky, the poetry section is seldom touched. Teachers take collections of poetry to use in their poetry units.

JV: Actually, in my school, there is a small coterie of students who read not only Silverstein, but Shakespearean poetry. I have some adaptations of the better-known plays that lead students to the real thing. We have some thin volumes of poetry by Edgar Allan Poe, which are very popular with the kids who like horror stories, and Robert Frost, Emily Dickenson, Dennis Lee and Robert Service, all because of classroom work.

IM: We brought in the front running poets, such as Doug Florian and Janet Wong. Then the books flew off the shelves. I think it's what we bring into our collections that determine if they go off the shelf or not.

PF: I think humour is also cool with kids. That is probably the link between Shel Silverstein and Jack Prelutsky. It is the link for older kids to other humorous books like *Click, Clack Moo: Cows that Type* by Dorothy Cronin and *The Diary of a Worm*. It gets older kids back into picture books.

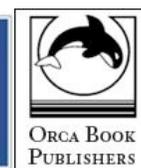
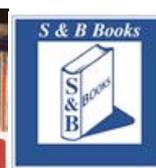
LS: Oh, yeh, like *The Secret Knowledge of Grownups* by David Wisniewski.

IM: Like John Sziescka's books.

PF: And contorted versions of fairytales, such as "fractured fairy tales."

JV: I have used picture books extensively in our reading literacy program. Obviously, with weaker readers, it is a way to engage them in a story that includes pictures and text. Gradually I move them along to books with more text than pictures, until we are in text exclusively. With strong readers, it is a means to demonstrate the continuum of reading. *The Velveteen Rabbit* is a children's story, but it has common themes with some very challenging young adult titles, such as *I am the Cheese*. Strong readers respond to that connection, and are able to expand the thematic concepts to specific books and genres.

PF: My daughter is a junior high student and she said science fiction and fantasy were her favourite genres. Science fiction and fantasy seem big with many junior high readers.



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PF: I think children are more aware of Canadian authors, such as Kenneth Oppel, Eric Walters, Hazel Hutchins, Julie Lawson, Kit Pearson and John Wilson, but also read very internationally.

IM: Robert Munsch, Georgia Graham, and Monica Hughes fly off my shelves. I still get asked for Martyn Godfrey and Gordon Korman books. What is cool is finding *Wired for Words* books and having the opportunity to share with others outside your own community. They love to review the books and share with other readers.

LS-K: *How has the "Wired for Words" site filled the much needed gap between struggling readers and avid readers?*

IM: It gives avid readers the opportunity to share with struggling readers some fabulous books that might not be accessible to them otherwise. They would never go and find *Eragon* and read it. I have one ESL (English as a Second Language) student who can't read *Eragon*, but is dying to read it because he has heard others talking about it after finding it on *Wired for Words*. He knows what the story is about and is dying to read it sometime.

PF: It is not just a gap, it fills a need. It provides an outlet for the avid readers and helps provide a bridge between all readers.

LS-K: The history of the *Wired for Words* site is to promote avid readership versus reading intervention, or other initiatives that focus on the mechanics of learning to read.

JV: Avid readers "read to learn." This is a need which the books on *Wired for Words* admirably address.

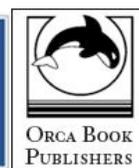
IM: *Wired for Words* brings back the focus on "reading for enjoyment." I look at my little kids who are learning to read. They love *Wired for Words* because they are picking books for enjoyment, and I am able to find a book to be read to them. *Diary of a Worm* has lots of reviews, and kids just love it. I need to encourage our kids to review other books as well.

PF: *Wired for Words* expands for kids the connection between books. When my grades four to six students go to the site, they search the older book lists, as they see themselves as older readers. It allows for that big reading range, as they don't just see the book lists for their age group.

LS: When I'm promoting the site I ask my older readers (upper elementary) to have a look at the thirteen through fifteen age category, but I tell them we may not have these titles on our shelves. They can go to the public library or find these titles later in junior high. Each month *Wired for Words* promotes Canadian authors and titles. It fills a huge gap, and I don't know of any other site that does that. It promotes the newest in Canadian literature.

IM: We also promote the best of Canadian literature. The selection is so huge now.

LS: The way our books are featured by the Canadian flag also helps promote Canadian authors and titles.



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PF: Kids just get overwhelmed with the choice. If the larger bookstores can't help, then this is the place to go for knowledgeable recommendations. Kids will ask, "Where are the mystery books?"

IM: They want you to find it now and select the best.

LS-K: *What are some successful strategies that you have used with your students, staff and parents to promote the use of the "Wired for Words" site?*

LS: Each month I've been printing off the features, cutting them out and laminating them. I now have a special display in the library for "Recommended on *Wired for Words*" where I highlight the featured books, new and past, along with the reviews. It's the most popular spot in the library. Now when kids come in the door, many of them head straight for the *Wired for Words* titles. I have parent volunteers regularly go through the shelves to pull the *Wired for Words* books and put them aside, so I can replenish my display several times a day.

IM: I put little yellow dots on the spine so they can find those books easily. I make sure I promote books on the site and do reviews on a regular basis with the students. I take every opportunity to promote the site.

LS: For the younger children it is fun to read a book from the site and then do a group review.

PF: I promote the site in our school newsletters, on the school website, and I have it as a library display.

LS: When kids ask for a book I say, "Let's look here," and now they all go to the site

IM: The site needs to be actively promoted.

PF: I use it with my library club.

LS: I use it as a buying list. If I don't have some of the titles I go and buy them. I combine our online catalogue search strategies with *Wired for Words*. I ask children to search the online catalogue to see if their *Wired for Words* title choice is available in our library.

IM: They do this at my school, too, and will immediately want to get the book and write the review. They write it in "Word" (Microsoft Word software) and paste it into the review. This effectively integrates technology into the curriculum in a more authentic way.

LS-K: I have also used the *Wired for Words* site at the senior high level to integrate technology within our English Language Arts curriculum. We had our students create journal lists of books they would like to read by searching our online catalogue, the *Wired for Words* site, other teen reading book sites and online bookstore sites, such as *Amazon.com*.

JV: We have conducted searches online in all four categories from picture books to adult titles on the web site. My students literally run the reading spectrum from beginning ESL readers to those students reading at an adult level. We look for



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familiar titles, titles by genre and familiar authors. I also offer displays every few weeks that feature *Wired for Words* titles by genre across the four categories. In the workshops I have conducted for the web site, participating teachers have talked about using the site as a community of readers opportunity.

LS-K: *Is there anything else you want to say in closure?*

PF: I really believe this is a unique, outstanding opportunity for students to support their fascination with reading.

LS: I'm really proud of the site. It is a unique site.

LS-K: The book features are different from professional reviews as they are written for kids, and are kid-friendly. Many teachers and parents also use the site as a reader advisory for themselves when selecting good books for reading with kids.

IM: It is informative, attractive, interactive and it is Canadian. It has a broad appeal outside the Alberta community. We have had reviews from New York , Montreal , and other provinces in Canada . We have had general appeal from United States .

IM: We are an award-winning site, having won the *Calgary Mayor's Choice Award for Technology in Learning* and the *AMTEC Award of Merit*.

PF: A big appeal is that kids are digitally orientated and therefore find this site attractive for them.

JV: This is site for readers who love books. There is a huge and growing collection of challenging, stimulating titles across a wide spectrum of ages and genres. All of the titles presented have appeal to keen readers.

LS-K: Thank-you for sharing your thoughts about youth and reading through your experiences as teacher-librarians with the *Wired for Words* website. Your expertise has been greatly appreciated and we will encourage everyone to check out our online youth book club (www.wiredforwords.com).

Background of "Wired for Words"

"Wired for Words" is an on-line book club for youth that gives young people the opportunity to share their love of reading with others. Under the sponsorship of various business partners and the volunteer efforts of the Calgary Board of Education's teacher-librarians, the site was officially launched in November, 2001. Telus and the Calgary Board of Education continue to partner this award-winning site (Calgary Mayor's Choice Award for Technology in Learning and the Association for Media Technology in Education in Canada Award of Merit) that is maintained and hosted by Media Services at the CBE. All recommended titles on the site have met the CBE evaluation and selection criteria for school library collections.

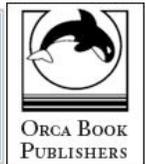
Check out the site at: www.wiredforwords.com

Alberta Authors Featured on "Wired for Words"



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B.J. Bayle – *Battle Cry at Batoche* Georgia Graham – *A Team Like No Other* Monica Hughes – *Storm Warning* Hazel Hutchins – *I'd Know You Anywhere, A Second is a Hiccup* Brian Keating – *Amazing Animal Adventures Around the World* Irene Morck – *Old Bird* Laurie Skreslet (with Elizabeth MacLeod) - *To the Top of Everest* Tyler Trafford - *The Story of Blue Eyes* Dawn Welykochy – *C is for Chinook: An Alberta Alphabet*



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Wired for Words: Group Photo & Promotional Poster

Editor's Note

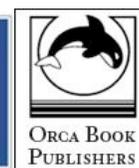
View and/or print the **Wired for Words Promotional Poster in PDF**. The following photo shows the enthusiastic crew behind the **Wired for Words** website discussed in the previous article.

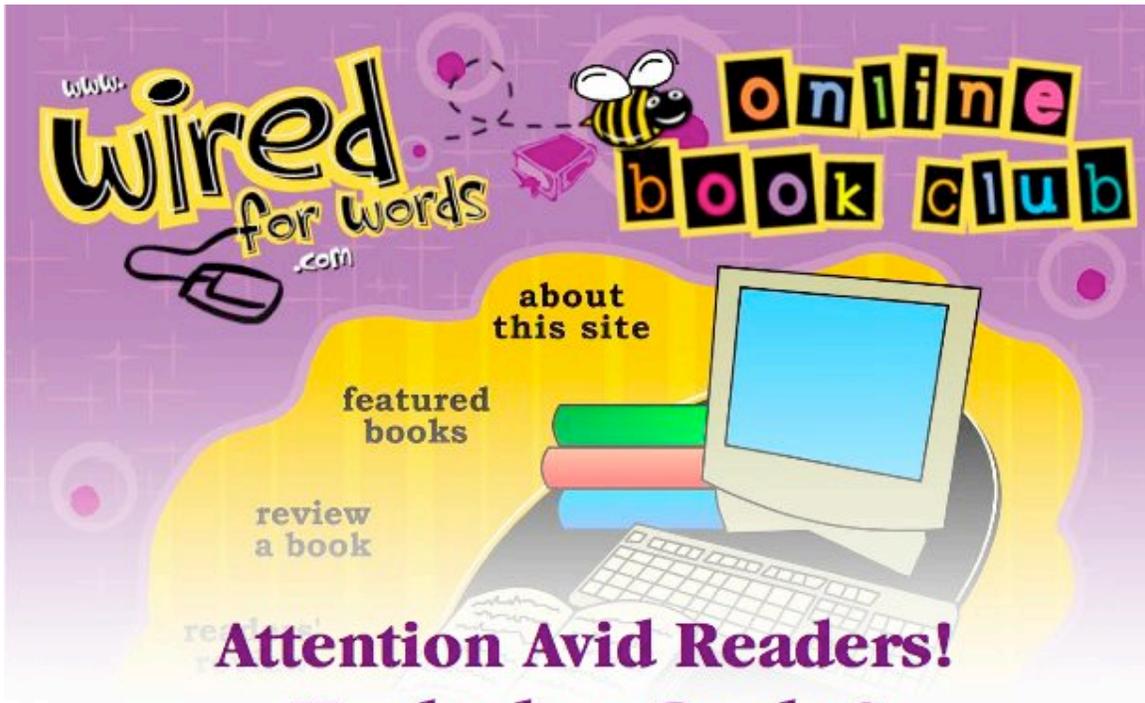


Front Row (Left to Right): Linda Steen (Teacher-Librarian), Pat Farley (Teacher-Librarian) **Back Row (Left to right):** Jacquie Vincent (Teacher-Librarian), Linda Shantz-Keresztes (Teacher-Librarian Consultant), Sharon Howarth (Web Designer), Renee Tetrault (Multi-Media Designer), Irene Masciuch (Teacher-Librarian)

For more Alberta Authors:

Check out the *Young Alberta Book Society* at <http://www.yabs.ab.ca/>





Attention Avid Readers! Hooked on Books?

Check out the **Wired for Words** site
and indulge in your favourite pastime.

www.wiredforwords.com

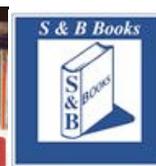
All books are recommended by teacher-librarians.
Brought to you by the Calgary Board of Education
in partnership with TELUS.



Calgary Board of Education



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SCHOOL LIBRARIES IN CANADA

Ebooks for Young Readers

Gloria Antifaiff

Gloria Antifaiff is Coordinator of Technology & Learning for Qu'Appelle Valley School Division in Saskatchewan and a sessional instructor for the University of Regina. She is past president of the Saskatchewan Reading Council. Gloria has her M. ED from the University of Saskatchewan in Educational Communications and Technology. She has won several awards as coordinator of the Ebook for Young Readers project and others for her work linking reading and technology from the International Reading Association.

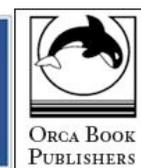
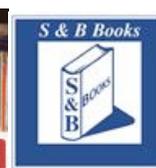
Ebooks for Young Readers - <http://www.saskschools.ca/~ebooks/>

Ebooks for Young Readers is a web site that provides a variety of electronic books (ebooks) for young beginning readers. The site currently hosts over 100 free ebooks that are easily accessed and downloaded from the Internet. The ebooks were developed by teachers and students using a desktop publishing program and a variety of digital and scanned images.

Each ebook offers the choice of four formats; ebook, book to print, quick print and book to edit. The ebook format is designed to be used with the free version of Adobe Reader. Adobe Reader offers a "read-about" option so a child can easily listen to the book. The book to print format is a four page PDF document. The book is designed for a double sided print. This will enable the page to be constructed into an actual book format. The quick print format is a 2 page PDF document designed to be printed, cut apart in quarters, and stapled into a quick book. The book to edit format is the original desktop publishing document. The book can be easily modified and customized to suit the needs of every individual without the restriction of copyright.

Most of the books are organized according to a reading level of 1-10. The site also provides a subject index so it is possible to view the book according to the subject category. There are also a variety of series books such as the *Alphabet* series or the *Canadian Cities* series.

Local and Global projects are two additional categories on the site. The local projects section contains books that were developed in a classroom but didn't follow the leveled books criteria. The global projects selection contains ebooks that were developed collaboratively with global partners. Classrooms in Qu'Appelle Valley School Division were partnered with classrooms from other countries. Together they decided on a topic for the development of an ebook and collaboratively developed one or more ebooks. The project concluded with the exchange of a cultural package sent by mail. For more information about joining the global *Ebooks for Young Readers* project, visit the Global Schoolhouse (<http://www.globalschoolnet.org>) or OZ Projects (<http://www.ozprojects.edna.edu.au/>) and conduct a search for the project.



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The *Ebooks for Young Readers* site also contains information and templates for those that would like to develop their own ebooks. A variety of templates and planning worksheets offer guidance to create ebooks.

The teacher section of the site provides ideas on how to use ebooks or the printed version of ebooks in the classroom. Ideas were contributed by teachers and provide suggestions on how to use the ebooks in a classroom setting.

Ebooks for Young Readers is surely a site that will offer a variety of reading material choices to young children learning how to read. The developers of this site hope that children will enjoy the variety of books on numerous topics and be motivated to continue reading. For more information about the "Ebooks for Young Readers" site contact Gloria Antifaiff at: gantifaiff@qvsd.ca



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Not Just An Author Visit's a Literacy Event

Jo-Anne Naslund and Ronald Jobe

Dr. Ronald Jobe is a full professor in the Department of Language and Literacy Education at the University of British Columbia. His research focuses on Canadian children's literature, reluctant readers, use of children's literature in the classroom, multicultural children's literature and literature in translation. Jo-Anne Naslund works as instructional programs librarian in the Education Library at the University of British Columbia. Her areas of research interest include young adult and children's literature, information literacy for teachers and the role of libraries in education.

Dear Linda Bailey

It's time to start planning Authorfest 2006. Thank you so much for agreeing to be a presenter. Your participation along with three other B.C. authors is an important part of our library program. All elementary student teachers, their instructors and graduate students studying children's literature at the University of British Columbia will attend. Members of the Vancouver Children's Literature Roundtable have also been invited and look forward to hearing you speak.

The purpose of Authorfest is to introduce student teachers to local British Columbia authors and model an author visit. Your talk should be about some of your books and include personal responses from children. Please share some of your positive school experiences including what impressed you. Our goal is to subtly cultivate best practices so that author visits become effective literacy events.

You will have 12- 15 minutes to present. In the audience there will be over 400 student teachers who attend as part of their language arts, early childhood or children's literature classes. The students receive a bibliography of your titles and following the presentation, Vancouver Kidsbooks will have books for sale. There will be time for autographing.

Following the event, it is our pleasure to invite you to join us at our favourite restaurant to meet the instructors and professors . . .

And so preparations for Authorfest in the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia begin. For us, it is one of the most rewarding and challenging of our teaching activities. As an education librarian, collaborating with faculty to help organize an annual author extravaganza is exciting; and as a children's literature professor, encouraging colleagues to become enthusiastic about the writers and read some of their books ahead of time, requires time and energy. This event involves cooperative planning, articulation of curricular goals, an unfailing enthusiasm for children's literature in the development of literacy, and a clear understanding of the role of libraries in education.

Authorfest...the students have a wonderful time experiencing first hand some of the outstanding writers in their community; the authors have a chance to present their books to the teachers of the future; and the bookseller makes new customers. A winning combination indeed!



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Phyllis Simon, Vancouver Kidsbooks.

Author visits to schools positively affect children's motivation to read and write. Teacher-librarians know that after an author visit children come to the library to borrow books to read. Currently in many provinces, ministries have mandated literacy as an education priority. All too often those literacy programs and methods are disconnected from school libraries. Reading becomes a negative experience for students as for the leveled readers in many of the literacy programs have mediocre stories and illustrations and are less engaging for students than the 'real books' in school libraries. (Association of Canadian Publishers, 2004). By enhancing students' personal connections with the reading and writing process, author visits can significantly increase reading frequency, fluency and comprehension.

The challenge initially is to have teachers actually undertake an author visit. Sometimes there is reluctance to take kids to hear a writer speak, particularly from non-reading educators. However, once teachers experience a good author visit, they are hooked. They see the enthusiasm of the students, are impressed by the quality of high-level questions being asked, and are very surprised by the eagerness of the students to read. Similarly, student teachers become excited about engaging literacy events if they have an opportunity to experience them first hand.

I found that my elementary students were always interested to hear about authors I was introducing them to - it made them more real because I was able to mention personal information or 'inside' details about the book. One little guy thought I knew them all personally!

Marilynne Black, Teacher, Graduate Student.

Teacher education programs have been criticized for not introducing student teachers to quality children's literature, and to Canadian children's books. The impetus for Authorfest was to celebrate our local writers. How could we increase student teachers' knowledge of Canadian children's authors and help them become aware of children's authors living in their own communities?

Authorfest exposes student teachers to the considerable talent here in B.C. and introduces them to authors and illustrators' presentation styles for the time when they may wish to have them as guests in their school/classroom.

Linda Dunbar, Education Librarian.

With resolute determination, Dr. Ronald Jobe together with the Vancouver Children's Literature Roundtable organized the first Authorfest in 1997. Its success led to another and then another, until now we are planning our ninth Authorfest. It has evolved into an annual celebration offered within a core language arts course taken by all elementary student teachers. By modeling a successful author visit in collaboration with the library, student teachers experience the benefits of a school wide literacy event and become excited and engaged with children's literature. As a consequence, they will be better equipped to collaborate with teacher-librarians to organize such events for their students.

On behalf of all the members of CWILL may I say that Authorfest has become one of the most important ways that writers and illustrators in British Columbia are



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introduced to future teachers and librarians . . . As well, I suspect some folks in Authorfest audiences have been inspired to write and illustrate books for children after hearing our members speak.

Kathryn Shoemaker, Illustrator, Lecturer, Graduate Student.

Authorfest continues because faculty looks forward to hearing the authors; and they are convinced of the event's instructional merit. Great care is taken to ensure that Authorfest showcases four B.C. children's authors whose works are appropriate for elementary students; includes literature from four different categories--fiction, poetry/plays, picture books, and information books; introduces children's books located in the Education Library; and above all, features lively engaging presenters. Each author is introduced by a fellow writer thus making the audience aware of even more B.C. writers.

. . . I love to participate in events that promote and support children's literature. Authorfest is always exciting and inspiring. Each year, it gives me the opportunity to see the amazing range of talent and diversity of books that have been created by our local authors.

Deborah Hodge, Teacher, Writer.

Administrative support for Authorfest has grown and thrives because of the strong partnerships that exist between the Faculty of Education, Vancouver Children's Literature Roundtable, UBC Library and community of BC authors.

The most successful literacy teachers are those who model a genuine love and enthusiasm for reading and for books. Authors are a source of unbridled enthusiasm that motivates young readers to become active readers. Teachers-to-be are also captivated by author visits. The excitement generated by author visits to the university classroom is an indispensable part of the teacher education program. Authorfest generates an enthusiasm for books and reading that cannot be duplicated anywhere else in the teacher education program.

Lee Gunderson, Head, Department of Language and Literacy Education

. . . it's a great event, and it broadens the horizons of the teachers, gets them thinking about authors as people, and plants the seeds for them to think about author visits in their schools later on when they graduate. . .

Chris Ball, Head, Education Library.

Author visits and literacy

How do successful author visits contribute to literacy and support curriculum? What planning needs to be done and how can teachers engage students in reading and writing as part of an author visit? (Beuchat, C. E., 1994; Buzzeo, 2002; Manning, 2002; McElmeel, S.L. 2001; Smith, 1999). Depending on the event, there is no special author visit formula. However, one thing is for certain, it is necessary to have a clear understanding of how an author visit develops student literacy and how it enhances the school's instructional goals. When everyone realizes the inherent reading and writing connections, the commitment of teachers increases and they willingly spend class time both before and after to involve their students in reading and writing activities.



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Poetry sometimes scares students. It can seem difficult, mysterious. Authorfest lets me, as a writer of children's poetry, celebrate my own joy in the language of poetry. As I read poems and tell my personal stories of being in schools as an author and teacher, I can take some of the mystery out of poetry and put its magic back in. Students can see how much playful pleasure they can give their own students by adding a bit of poetry to their future teaching.

Robert Heidbreder, Teacher, Poet

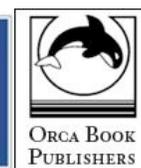
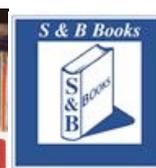
I'm always amazed at the enthusiasm for children's literature that your Authorfest creates. What a splendid idea the whole event is!

Norma Charles, Teacher, Writer.

Ten Ways Author Visits Develop Student Literacy

An author visit :

1. **Supports a love of books:** "I have to read that book!" By making the event a celebration, it is a grand opportunity to share the children's enthusiasm for new titles and books.
2. **Promotes reading:** Everyone in the school has to read one of the author's books, either by themselves or by listening to a teacher read it aloud. It is simply too embarrassing (and rude) not to have read the author's works before they come. Reading silently, reading aloud and reading in unison – all work to increase reading fluency and help build vocabulary.
3. **Fosters family literacy:** When parents are invited to attend the presentation, it guarantees that conversation about the ideas in the books continues at home. Parents will want to read to their children, and the author visit will introduce them to some interesting children's books.
4. **Encourages young writers:** Children come to realize that writers are just like everybody else, and they spend lots of time practicing their writing skills. They realize that if you want to be a writer, you must be a reader!
5. **Fosters the writing and research process:** When students listen to an author tell about their personal writing process, they get a practical example of how the process works and of the role of research in finding and creating the details for each book.
6. **Initiates Info-Connexions:** Students come to realize the importance of factual links to internet sites, magazines and informational books. These help to place the author's work in the world of information.
7. **Develops critical literacy:** As students ask questions and hear others, their critical literacy is heightened and their personal understanding and responses are deepened.
8. **Promotes Canadian culture:** Once fascinated by a local writer, students will want to find out about other Canadian authors, illustrators and poets.
9. **Connects libraries and literacy:** Your public library card is your passport to literacy! Author visits reinforce the concept of libraries as key places to find good books, references, research assistance and cultural events.
10. **Celebrates the gift of words through differing genres:** By experiencing a wide diversity of literary works, students gain a greater appreciation of the art and craft of reading and writing.



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Making an Author Visit Happen

Once there is a clear understanding of the purpose of an author visit and how it develops student literacy, then decide if the event will take place over several days as part of a literacy week or be a one author visit. Always start with the keen teachers as their enthusiasm will guarantee the event's success. The type of visit will vary depending upon its purpose, and the energy and financial resources of the school. Some types of author visits include: one author in a classroom; one author for a specific level (primary, intermediate); one author for an entire day talking to four groups of students--a challenge to find a writer who feels comfortable talking to all levels, K -7; and a literacy week with several authors, one per division/level.

Finding the Right Author or Illustrator

For anyone who loves to read, this is the most exciting part of the entire planning process – making a dream list of speakers. You know their books, you like their writing style, and you have always wanted to meet them. However, it's time to get real. Consider you budget as the host is responsible for transportation and accommodation if the visit involves an overnight stay. Remember American writers receive significantly higher speaking fees, not counting the rate of exchange. Don't know the local writers? It's never too late to start going to author appearances at local bookstores, public libraries and Children's Literature Roundtables. Talk to professors, booksellers and public librarians who know the writers. Ask which ones would be good for your school community.

The Canadian Children's Book Center in Toronto promotes reading and authors. Consider having the school become a member and get the publications, especially *Canadian Children's Book News*, a quarterly newsletter; and *Our Choice*, an annotated catalogue of the best titles of each year. Their dynamic web site links to author/illustrator resources

http://www.bookcentre.ca/authors/author_resources.shtml and to their regional representatives. Writer organizations also have very valuable web sites: The Children's Writers & Illustrators of British Columbia (CWILL B.C.) <http://www.cwill.bc.ca>; Young Alberta Book Society <http://www.yabs.ab.ca>; and Canadian Society of Children's Authors Illustrators and Performers (CANSCAIP) <http://www.canscaip.org>.

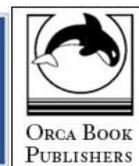
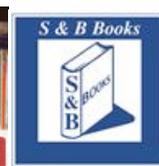
Association of Canadian Publishers. (2004)

http://www.publishers.ca/CNM_GetFile.wws?file_id=22

Some Nitty Gritty Details

Remember that for a successful literacy event, it is absolutely necessary to be organized. Start with a clear idea of what you want to achieve, who you want to invite, which classes will attend, and what the author is expected to do. Consider the following:

- When do you want the author visit to take place? What is the optimum time considering the major events in the school year? Consider Canadian Children's Book Week in early November.
- Where should it take place? Where is there adequate seating and presentation space, both comfortable for the author and audience? Be sure there is room for parents to attend?
- What to decide first? Before speaking to a writer, it is important to know



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possible dates, what grade levels will be involved, how many sessions will be given, and how the author will travel to the school.

- **What are the costs?** All writers receive an honorarium (+ GST); such as those suggested by CANSCAIP or CWILL B.C. Rates vary from person to person depending on the number of sessions per day and the size of the groups. Some writers have per session, per day or even per child rates. Transportation must be included. Most writers have an information sheet that they happily forward to any organizer clarifying their type of program, preferred age groups and group size.
- **What to include in the letter to the author?** After an initial telephone call or email, the teacher-librarian must follow-up with a formal letter stating the expectations of the school and the fees to be paid. The more detailed the better as this is a type of contract. For schools requiring an invoice, be certain to inform the writer in advance.
- **How to raise the funds?** Be bold, request that the event be part of the school's budget or sponsored by parents. Kids can also fundraise by holding bottle drives, bake sales, book fairs. Why not undertake a 'reading for pennies' marathon where kids get sponsors and the money raised goes to author visits.
- **How to promote the author visit?** It is a MUST that all staff, students and parents in a school know what is happening and who is coming. Biographical information is crucial, along with photographs.

Literacy Activities for Author Visits

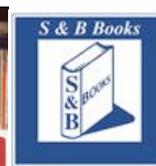
For literacy skills to be developed, reinforced and enhanced engage students in reading, writing, and speaking activities as part of an author visit. Consider some of the following ideas and add to them.

Before the Author Visit

- Teachers and principal read aloud at least one of the books by the author during class time or in the library.
- Excerpts are selected from the author's books and appear in school newsletters to entice parents to attend the event and to read with their children.
- Hallway and classroom displays feature art and writing connected to the books.
- A reading list is given to teachers, children and their parents. The bibliography is posted on the school or library's web site.
- The author's web site (if available) is located to help generate questions.
- A word wall of favourite, unusual or captivating words from the author's books is created. This is vocabulary building at its best.

During the Author Visit

- A student welcoming committee greets the author and introduces her to the principal.
- A technical support group of students assists the author with their audiovisual equipment or speaking props as required.
- Students prepare written introductions for the author and practice to present them.
- Students devise written questions, based on their reading, to ask during the



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session.

- Students organize a thank you for the author—oral presentation, card, letter etc.
- Students design and present a gift basket featuring items appropriate to and based upon the author's works.

After the Author Visit

- The class prepares an e-mail to send to the author that includes their top three unasked questions.
- Young reporters write a summary piece on the author visit for the parent newsletter, community newspaper or school web site.
- Students create a 'reactions to the author' bulletin board featuring student, parent, teacher and staff comments.
- Students present their principal with an autographed copy of one of the visiting author's books.
- Young authors organize a fair to present and publish their writing.
- Students experiment and write in the style of the visiting author.
- Students create raps to summarize and advertise books by the author.

Memorable Literacy Event

An author visit is not an isolated incident or an entertaining occasion to simply fill in time; rather it is a significant literacy event in the lives of children. They will never forget that a particular author came to their school. Our challenge is to ensure that Authorfest continues so that new teachers will experience author visits first hand, learn of outstanding local authors, and understand how such events promote children's life-long reading enjoyment, appreciation of Canadian culture and desire to use libraries.

Why do you have students attend this event as part of their Language Arts course?

It is required . . . If not, I would encourage my students to go anyway based on the premise that 'meeting' authors is a great tie into what can be done in elementary school classrooms, bringing in authors or artists for that matter, for children to meet and ask questions. It is a terrific incentive to becoming a young author in their own lives right here and now, huge motivation to keep on learning and enjoying reading literature.

Catherine Bailey, Teacher, Sessional Lecturer.

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Nous sommes à la recherche de publicité pour continuer de produire SLIC sur Internet pour les professeurs bibliothécaires à travers le Canada et autour du monde. Les individus, associations ou organisations désirant faire de la publicité sont priés de nous **contacter** pour plus d'informations.

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