
YAACING

SPRING 2007

The Newsletter of the Young Adult & Children's Services Section of BCLA

What's Inside....

Call For Submissions	.....	1
Message from the Chair	.....	2
Message from the Editors	.....	3
The Loss of Listening: And It's Return Through Storytelling	.....	4
Children's Utterage: Orality, Library, and Listener	.....	6
Tricky Tales: A Storytime for Kindergarten	.....	15
The Power of the Puppet: The Benefits and Joys of Using Puppets in the Public Library	.....	18
Public Library Screen Media Resources: For Babies and Toddlers	.....	22
Red Cedar Award Program	.....	27
What is the Problem? Teens as "Problem" Patrons in Libraries	.....	28
Getting Your Feet Wet With Graphic Novels	.....	35
Friends and Food: Preschool Storytime	.....	40
The Gift of Storytelling	.....	42

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

We'd Love to Hear from You!

YAACING is published four times a year and always looking for submissions that might interest our membership. If you have tried something new at your library, would like to write a column, report on a conference session, or know of an upcoming event for the calendar, please share it with us. Mail, email or fax your material to:

Phillippa Brown
Youth Librarian
Bruce Hutchinson Library
Greater Victoria Public Library
4636 Elk Lake Drive
Victoria, BC V8Z 7K2
Phone: 250-727-0104; Fax: 250 382-7126
pbrown@gvpl.ca

Joanne Canow
Children's and Teen Librarian
Renfrew Branch Library
Vancouver Public Library
2969 East 22nd Ave.
Vancouver, BC
Phone: 604-257-8781; Fax: 604-257-8704
joanncan@vpl.ca

Deadlines are as follows:

Spring issue for March/April – Feb 1st

Summer issue for May/June – April 1st

Fall issue for September/October – August 1st

Winter issue for December/January – November 1st

Next Deadline:

Spring Issue: April 01

Message from the Chair

Spring 2007

Hello fellow YAACers!

I can't believe it – Spring is just around the corner and so is the 2007 BCLA conference! Thanks to the hard work of our Vice-Chair, Vicki Donoghue, we have a great selection of sessions with a children's librarianship focus to choose from this year. I hope as many of you as possible will be able to attend - it promises to be a conference to remember! Come with lots of coats and bags for our first Coat Check – our Sheila Egoff Prize fundraiser! We'll look after all your stuff while you attend your favourite conference sessions.

The YAACS executive is planning to add a new teacher-librarian position to our executive to ensure representation from this important group of BC librarians.

Also, don't forget to attend our YAACS AGM on Saturday, April 21st, during the BCLA Conference. Jacqueline van Dyk will be there to show and tell this year's Summer Reading Club materials! The AGM is during the lunch break and there'll be complimentary coffee and tea. I tried for a martini bar but my request wasn't even acknowledged!

We are only as strong as our membership, so please come and show your support!

Christopher Kevlahan
Chair, YAACS

Many thanks for the many wonderful, varied, and interesting submissions to our newsletter this past fall and winter.



Message from the Editors

Thank you so much for the opportunity to work on YAACING - I've really enjoyed this editing experience. This is my second and final edition of YAACING for this 2006-2007 year. Phillipa Brown, my co-editor, should be applauded for having published YAACING independently for years and years. She will continue her service to you, our membership, by publishing the Summer edition of YAACING.

Fraser Valley Regional Library (FVRL) should receive special thanks from all of us for their steadfast and consistent support of our professional newsletter. At least one professional staff member has made a submission for each edition this past year. We are convinced there must be a system mandate to rescue us from previous year's scant and scarce submissions. Kudos to all of you pen-flourishing FVRLers who have buoyed the quality of our newsletter and been so generous with your knowledge, ideas, and time. I'd like to challenge a few more of our many great BC library systems to support their employee's professional activities and mentorship to our members.

We've had a banner year with an increase of submissions in general and an exciting range of interesting, practical, and sometimes challenging articles. SLAIS students continue to offer original ideas through edited papers and practical storytime suggestions. One student submitted a SLAIS student storytime idea in the Fall as well as a paper after beginning full time work as a children's librarian in the New Year. Both his submissions are included in this edition. We've also had a storyteller submit pieces on the importance of storytelling. His CD's grace our collections and his stories act as bookends for this Spring edition. Our FVRL piece is about graphic novels and offers succinct Reader's Advisory tips about the major and popular titles. Together, Phillipa and I have solicited thoughtful articles that will benefit your service to children and youth.

I cannot emphasize how much YAACING's success depends on your submissions and hope to continue to be blessed with the wealth of our shared knowledge.

Enjoy!

Joanne Canow
Co-Editor of YAACING

The Loss of Listening

And It's Return Through Storytelling

By Robert Max Tell Stelmach

Oliver Wendell Holmes (1809-1894) once said, "It is the province of language to speak and it is the privilege of wisdom to listen." And yet today, listening has been reduced to something little more than sound bites. Not too many years ago, a popular radio station in Vancouver, British Columbia, regularly aired the following piece of sophistry: "If I wanted to hear someone talk, I'd listen to my wife."

Before the birth of language and well afterward, listening was a key to survival. Hearing the sound of a flock of birds suddenly taking flight, or the snapping of a twig in the forest or jungle could mean the difference between life and death. And once language took hold, listening to the wisdom of elders, setting that wisdom to memory (how to hunt, when to hunt, and where to hunt), and passing that wisdom down from father to son, also could mean the difference between life and death. Women too were held in high state, for their knowledge was just as essential to survival (what roots and berries were edible, which were not, and which were poisonous). This knowledge was passed down from generation to generation by listening. And with this knowledge, many a tribe was saved from extinction during years of drought.

As man's ability and skill of listening grew, much of the history of tribes began to be passed down through the spoken word. Homer's Iliad and Odyssey were fruits of that skill. So was the Bible, and all early religious tomes. Up until the late Twentieth Century, the entire history of India survived over the millennia through listening. And up until recently, many a family history was passed on in the same fashion, through the auditory functioning of the ear and the ultimate memorization of story. Listening and story go hand in hand.

Recently, however, as mentioned above, listening has been getting a bad rap. Television and the internet, and all the latter's variations, from emails and chat rooms to blogs, have given us the power to make ourselves heard, while reducing our power to listen, and as a result has left us speechless. Not that we do not have a lot to say, but rather that we have little to say that is worth listening to.

I too have been bitten by the email bug, have used chat rooms periodically, and am in the process of creating my own blog. However, listening, to me, remains a priority, like a language threatened with extinction. And with that threat of extinction comes the belief that listening is far more important than it has ever been. The generation gap can be bridged through listening. A marriage can be saved through listening. Wars can be stopped or prevented through listening. And it is through listening, from the heart, that friendships begin, grow, and sustain themselves through everything, including adversity.

And where does listening begin? Or where is it regained? With children, or with one child at a time. And with storytelling. Storytelling can reach beyond the written word, and beyond promotional propaganda, be it political or part of ad campaigns that have become so much a part of our everyday lives. Storytelling can reach into a child's listening heart and leave there a memory that will last a lifetime, never to be forgotten. And with story, the seed of more listening is planted, and from listening, the plant called wisdom grows.

Robert Stelmach, a.k.a. Max Tell, is a writer, storyteller, and educator. His latest CD, *Dragon with a Flagon* is, "a fun choice for family listening, and a solid addition to public library collections." – School Library Journal, January 2005. Last summer, Max toured twenty-nine libraries in the Okanagan. To view video clips of the tour go to his website: <http://www.maxtell.ca>.

Children's Utterature: Orality, Library, and Listener

Submitted by: Amanda McKinlay for SLAIS Library 527

“Who can measure how far-reaching a story may be?” So asks editor Ethel L. Heins in the introduction to *Horn Book Magazine's* June 1983 storytelling issue (263). A story, she imagines, “may help to lay a pattern for a rich life; it may start a young, untried artist creating. How aware may a story make a boy or girl of beauty, goodness, courage, yes, and mercy?” (263). Heins holds high hopes for the oral word, wishing that it might enrich experience, inspire artistry, arouse a more profound sense of humanity in children. Innate in her respect for the oral tradition is esteem for the imagination. “Imagination disposes of everything; it creates beauty, justice, and happiness, which are everything in this world” (Pascal 15). Of course, Heins' questions of story are rhetorical. Who indeed could measure a story's power? Measure it how? By its longitudinal mileage in children's memories? By its velocity upon emotional impact?

A mere quarter century ago, the idea that one might quantify the value of story was an amusing concept. Yet, with new means of monitoring children's brain development, researchers have focused their attention on just that—the cognitive accomplishments of the spoken word. A catalogue search for books and articles relating oral literature and children will produce a wealth of recent publications attempting to measure the worth of literature-sharing by percentage points, formulas,ⁱ even brain cell poundage.ⁱⁱ The field of children's librarianship today seems to be exceedingly concerned with the relationship between storytime and alphabet recognition, phonemic awareness, vocabulary acquisition and general intelligence—each inarguably important to literacy and future successes. However, the true essence and value of literature sharing—the traditional oral kind of communication—may be getting lost in the ideological shuffle.

Library storytimes that celebrate orality, that release words to dance and sing and trip and leap in the air unhinged from the spines of books, unbound from cornered, typefaced pages, can foster not only the know-how essential to literacy, but also the image-making mind, the aesthetic spirit, and the feeling heart. Imagination, enthusiasm and

community are essential to motivated, life-long learning and achieving. *Utterature*, a term coined by Canadian children's poet Sheree Fitch, can reconnect children to their imaginations, to the aesthetic power of language, and to a cultural community through "eyeball to eyeball and cheek to cheek communication" (Fitch 33).

Fitch defines utterature as "all literature which depends upon the oral tradition and community of listeners"(8); utterature is "literature ... for the ear and voice and body—all poetry and stories rooted in the oral tradition" (31).ⁱⁱⁱ Utterature also "invites participation" (29) in the form of singing, movement, or choral telling. Utterature is the stuff of the quintessential library storytime: interactive story, rhyme, and song. In fact, the three modes of utterature overlap significantly. Laura Simms considers a story to be "a poem created in midair" (344); Fitch believes that the "reciting of poetry is [simply] one form of storytelling ... the oldest form of storytelling" (116); Jane Marino thinks that when you "sing a song, you are telling a story" (1). In children's programming, story, rhyme, and song clearly enhance one another and foster further affect and significance. Songs and poems "piggyback on the story experience" (Vardell 64) and can "break up the monotony of prose stories [giving] something fresh and vivid in a short compass of words" (Sawyer 190). Songs and poems can also "set the atmosphere" (Sawyer 190) and strengthen the message or feeling of a story (Marino 1). In this way, thoughtful connections are made, emotions are deepened. Utterature in any or all forms may teach children something about ABC's; but philosophers of oral communication argue there is greater, more significant, more magical potential in it than that.

Imagination

Eileen Colwell reminds librarians that, "although children may learn a great deal as they listen, this is not the primary reason for telling stories. Stories provide a stimulus to the imagination which cannot be found elsewhere" (267). She believes the "rhymes and stories the child hears when they are young are invaluable" (Colwell 268) because they feed the imagination. In front of television and computer screens, imaginations starve. Educational psychologist Jane Healy explains that "external symbols" (29), or pictures on the screen, limit children's capacity to create internal images in the mind with language (29). When children "stare at images contrived by someone else," (Torrence 279), they not only miss

out on “the delight of using their own imaginations” (Torrence 279), but may also lose the capacity to imagine altogether. “Fast-paced, nonlinguistic, and visually distracting television may literally have changed children’s minds, making sustained attention to verbal input, such as reading or listening, far less appealing than faster paced visual stimuli” (Healy 32). However, children whose imaginations are practiced seem to “have superior concentration, less aggression, more sensitivity to others, and the ability to take more pleasure in what they do” (Healy 228).

Listening to “stories told gives children practice in visualization. As children listen they create the scenes, the action, the characters. The ability to visualize, to fantasize, is the basis of creative imagination” (Baker and Greene 22). Likewise, the poem, dense with imagery, is a feast for the imagination. “Poems for children are like toys that are made out of words, and these words give wings to their imagination. Children want to sing them, to dance with them, and to play with them” (Mahmud Kianush qtd. in Vardell 11). Sawyer finds that “children are alert early to the picture-making quality in poetry” (190). Flannel cutouts or puppets often complement an oral segment of a program; however, even younger children can “benefit from listening without visual aids. They learn to imagine their own visual impressions and to listen and absorb only through their ears” (Connor 69). Jane Marino argues that songs too “lend themselves to plenty of imagination” (33). Unfortunately, we can no longer take for granted that children hold the imagination “with strength and use it with freedom and faith” (Sawyer 115).^{iv} In this technologically driven era of ready-made pictures, more focus must be placed back on the verbal roots of story, whence imagination springs. “Technology is not satisfying our deeper needs” (Wolkstein and Wiggins 350). Utterature can.

Through utterature and the aid of maturing imaginations, the children’s librarian becomes a magician of “words, time and space” (Simms 344). The beauty of the oral expression sensitizes children to the aesthetics of language. The “child becomes aware of the magic and music of words” (Colwell 269). The reciprocal nature of utterature also unites adults and children in a common experience that signals kinship. Utterer and listener move together to a “time out of ordinary time, in which thinking, imaging, and dreaming might occur” (Wolkstein and Wiggins 350). Thus, at the crossroads of children’s story, poem, and song is the heart of aesthetic appreciation and a sense of community.

Aesthetic Appreciation

While Colwell perceives imaginative growth to be the “primary reason for telling stories” (267), Augusta Baker and Ellin Greene consider an aesthetic “heightened awareness” (18) to be “the primary purpose of storytelling ... other uses and effects [being] secondary” (18). Storytelling, hand in hand with poetry performance and song, bring “to the listeners ... a sense of wonder, of mystery, of reverence for life” (Baker and Greene 18). Children hear “with their whole beings” (Simms 346). Sharing oral literature, the librarian may play a role in ‘the magical moment when children fall in love with words: they notice that the sounds of language fall gently on the ear, they discover double meanings, and they notice the playfulness of language’ (Bernice Cullman qtd. in Vardell 11). Listening to language is as much a physical and emotional sensation as a cognitive one. Sawyer and Fitch insist that children need not understand what they hear, only taste and feel the words. Participating in choral recitation, children discover that language “is a playground where they can tumble with the sounds and textures of words ... Language slides and slips. It is pure fun”^v (Fitch 79).

The language of poetry draws special attention to itself. Carole Fiore believes “the love of language is fanned by the love of poetry. And that love of language is what sparks literacy development.” Sawyer asks that librarians select poems to share based on quality, not age-level, for “children want to feel, to gather in the beauty, the sense of something hidden, to be revealed later” (189). Fiore finds that “strange words arranged [strangely] can be relished as a way to escape the ordinary.” Fitch quotes Lewis Carroll’s Alice, who, upon hearing “Jabberwocky” admits, “I am not sure that I understand it, though it fills my head with lots of ideas” (qtd. in Fitch 32). In the words of a four-year-old: “You don’t have to understand poetry. You just like it” (Sawyer 189).

Utterance enables the orator, “through the magic quality of the spoken word, to reveal to the child the charm and subtle connotations of word sounds, all the evanescent beauty emanating from combinations of words and from the cadence, the haunting ebb and flow, of rhythmical prose” (Baker and Green 18). Set free to twirl about their heads, word sounds awaken the aesthetic centre of children’s spirits and efface the possibility that words could be “merely black marks on a page, like dead insects with pins stuck through them”

(Simms 248). Oral literature of various subjects and shapes is “one of the best ways to teach children the pure joy of story” (Connor 69) and language in general.

Community

As Fitch expresses in her definition of utterature, community is also a chief product of sharing oral literature. “There is no book or other object between the storyteller and the children, allowing the storyteller to maintain full eye contact with the children” (Connor 69). The speaker expresses him or herself as much through eye contact as through voice and gesture. The eyes of the speaker communicate “a desire that the listener should understand and share [the speaker’s] feelings” (Colwell 267). Sylvia Vardell finds poetry to be particularly powerful when shared aloud, for a poem elicits an emotional response and begs to be discussed. A shared poem creates “a social connection as well as a language experience” (Vardell 5). Likewise, “experiences with music ... touch the emotions and ... communicate thoughts, ideas, feelings, and stories. Equally important, music and movement help people form relationships and bond with one another” (Dodge 430). Storytime becomes an event that establishes personal connections—even an “intimate relationship” (Colwell 266)—between librarian and child, between children, and between child and literary character. In the sharing of feelings there is kinship.

Perhaps, as Kornei Chukovsky believed, cultivating a sense of community is the primary goal of storytelling. Chukovsky viewed storytelling as the way to ‘fostering in the child, at whatever cost, compassion and humaneness—this miraculous ability of man to be disturbed by another being’s misfortunes, to feel joy about another being’s happiness, to experience another’s fate as one’s own” (qtd. in Baker and Greene 22). Fitch notes an important quality of the storytime experience: it is safe. In the telling, children can safely experience difficult emotions and threatening journeys that psychologically give them a sense of faith in themselves and in the rightness of the universe. “Children ... gain control of terrible fears and an understanding of overwhelming wonders” (Simms 349).

In the moment of the telling or reading of a poem or tale there is the creation of a safe place. By safe place I mean the world and place of the story that can be entered into and where listeners and tellers are enveloped by very different worlds than the here and now reality. Worlds where cows jump over moons, where dishes and spoons run away with each other, where monsters exist but are conquered. By safe place, I also mean the community in which that story happens. The eyeball to eyeball cheek to cheek communication between people, that for a moment creates a protection (Fitch 45).

Of course, the community of the library in which the telling takes place may, by extension, take on the aura of safety.^{vi} The library storytime occurs in a cocooned space in that “time out of ordinary time” (Wolkstein and Wiggins 350); likely, the child equates the library with that psychological place and in some manner returns there upon entering the physical space. Fiore notes that “for many of the children we work with, providing them a way to escape through words is a significant and priceless gift.”

Oral literature has the ability to satisfy “the human needs to communicate, to touch, to feel, and to love” (Ramon Ross qtd. in Torrence 279). Healy worries that “as a culture we increasingly esteem technological intelligence and devalue the social and emotional” (28). Colwell warns that it is through oral tellings that children learn “to share in other people’s lives and so develop compassion and understanding for different ways of living” (268). Healy regrets the effort society takes to fill children’s heads with information; instead, “we should be more concerned with the thinking, caring, aesthetically sensitive humans they are becoming” (29). More than ever, “today we can give children no greater gift than communication from the heart” (Simms 346).

The Hunger-Trail

“We get a certain satisfaction as well as a sense of accurate values when we measure things.... But what of story—the telling of it? What of its poundage in educational and spiritual values? Can we prove anything?” (Sawyer qtd. in Heins). Standardized tests may prove improvements in children’s reading abilities. The benefits of utterature, however, are immeasurable. What images does the child see in her mind’s eye? According to Colwell, “the child’s imagination must be stimulated from an early age if he is to develop as a person” (Colwell 267). In which directions might the listening child have developed? Carl Sagan writes, “Imagination will often carry us to worlds that never were.

But without it we go nowhere” (2). Where will the listening, dreaming child go from here? How has the energy of the spoken word shifted the child’s inner-self? Colum prays that the day will come when the truth is “written above all places of education: ‘Imagination is the beginning of creation. You imagine what you desire; you will what you imagine; and at last you create what you will’” (365). What quiet support will the child glean from the experience of community when that child journeys through self-creation?

The librarian’s treatment of utterature extends beyond programming as well. The librarian, “by making the connections between books and storytelling ... introduces books as a source of pleasure throughout life” (Baker and Greene 20). In the same way, the librarian can create excitement about poetry, a genre that can potently affect thought and feeling, but a genre often neglected in children’s programming and collections. Professional literature suggests an abundance of ways that children’s librarians could promote poetry collections.^{vii} In essence, however, librarians need simply apply the same strategies to poetry that they do to fiction: “read aloud, display books, share booklists, and develop programs” (Vardell 13). Perhaps the library could host an “Utterature Evening,” inviting youths to share their own stories, poetry, songs. Many children will be creatively inspired by the oral literature the librarian has shared; “the listener becomes a master of the word, holder of the power of language” (Simms 349). By communicating oral literature to children, librarians “lay the hunger-trail into a world of fresh discovery” (Heins 263). Those that follow—like Hansels and Gretels through the ages of oral tradition—are the heroes and heroines of the future. They are the listeners.^{viii}

Endnotes:

1 “Experts in literacy and child development have discovered that if children know eight nursery rhymes by heart by the time they’re four years old, they’re usually among the best readers by the time they’re eight” (Fox 85).

2 “Amazingly, although the number of cells actually decreases, brain weight can double during the first year of life. How? As neurons respond to stimuli seen, heard, felt, or tasted, they fire off messages that build new physical connections to neighboring cells, linking them into efficient relay systems” (Healy 17).

3 Fitch contrasts *utterature* with *letterature*, “literature from the page ... for the eye and mind. Read silently, reflected upon by a reader of the poem or story or novel” (31).

4 Speaking of the adult’s mind in 1942, Ruth Sawyer writes that it “has become cluttered with rubbish Details rush in to fog [one’s] attention; [the] mind is full of extraneous matter, all to be sifted and thrown into the discard” before the imagination may be accessed

(117). Sadly, Sawyer's depiction of adulthood matches the over-stimulated experience of the child in the twenty-first century.

6 Vancouver libraries, in a 2005 campaign called *Beyond Words*, solicited essays from library users explaining "How public libraries changed my life for the better." One of the most common responses expressed the library as "a sanctuary, an oasis, a respite, an escape, a refuge" (Heubert 5).

7 Fiore suggests librarians invite poets to recite for children since they may best convey "the genuine beauty of the language and the meaning behind the words."

8 In *Suddenly They Heard Footsteps*, Dan Yashinsky writes a myth that aims "to teach us how to listen in a new way to the earth, to each other, to our children, to our dreams" (175). He names the hero of the myth *Listener*.

Works Cited:

Baker, Augusta and Ellin Greene. Storytelling: Art & Technique. New York: R.R. Bowker, 1987.

Chambers, Aidan. "Letter From England: Ever After." Horn Book Magazine. 59 (1983): 339-343.

Colum, Padraic. "Storytelling New and Old." Horn Book Magazine. 59 (1983): 358-365.

Colwell, Eileen. "What is Storytelling?" Horn Book Magazine. 59 (1983): 265-269.

Connor, Jane Gardner. Children's Library Services Handbook. Phoenix: Oryx, 1990.

Dodge, Diane Trister, Laura J. Colker and Cate Heroman. Creative Curriculum for Preschool. Washington: Teaching Strategies 2002.

Fiore, Carole D. "Entice Readers to Poetry." The Children's Book Council. 2006. 22 November, 2006. <<http://www.cbcbooks.org/yppw/articles/fiore.html>>

Fitch, Sheree. The Sweet Chorus of Ha, Ha, He! Polyphony in Utterature: A Collection of Writings on Children's Poetry. MA thesis. Acadia University, 1994.

Fox, Mem. Reading Magic: Why Reading Aloud to Our Children will Change their Lives Forever. New York: Harcourt, 2001.

Healy, Jane M. Failure to Connect: How Computers Affect Our Children's Minds—and What We Can Do About It. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998.

Heins, Ethel L. "Editor's Note." Horn Book Magazine. 59 (1983): 260-263.

Heubert, Joy. "Reading Beyond Words." Pacific National Library Association Quarterly. 69:4. 30 November 2006.
<http://www.pnla.org/quarterly/Summer2005/PNLA_Summer_05.pdf>

Marino, Jane. Sing Us a Story: Using Music in Preschool and Family Storytimes. New York: H.W. Wilson, 1994.

-
- Pascal, Blaise. Pensées. Trans. Roger Ariew. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004.
- Sagan, Carl. Cosmos. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1960.
- Sawyer, Ruth. The Way of the Storyteller. New York: Viking, 1942.
- Simms, Laura. " 'Words in our Hearts': The Experience of the Story." Horn Book Magazine. 59 (1983): 344-349.
- Torrence, Jackie. "Storytelling." Horn Book Magazine. 59 (1983): 279-286.
- Vardell, Sylvia M. Poetry Aloud Here! Chicago: ALA, 2006.
- Wolkstein, Diane and James Wiggins. "On Story and Storytelling: A Conversation." Horn Book Magazine. 59 (1983): 350-357.
- Yashinsky, Dan. Suddenly They Heard Footsteps. Toronto: Knopf, 2004.



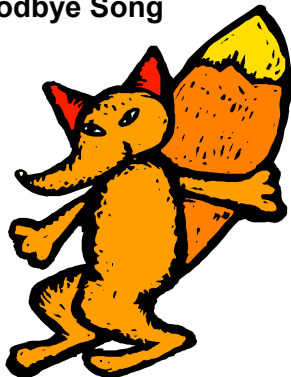


TRICKY TALES

A STORYTIME FOR KINDERGARTEN

OUTLINE

- Opening Song
- **Book:** *The Boy Who Cried Wolf*, by B.G. Hennessy.
- **Rhyme:** “Five Little Sheep”
- **Song:** “Put Your Thumb in the Air”
- **Book:** *How the Ostrich Got its Long Neck*, by Verna Aardema
- **Song:** “Animals in the Jungle”
- **Flannel Story:** *The Gingerbread Man*
- **Song:** “Gingerbread”
- **Poem:** “The End”
- **Goodbye Song**



SONGS & RHYMES

Hello Song: (Tune of “Row Your Boat”)

*Hush, ssh, quiet please,
Let’s all gather near,
Find a friend and sit right
down,
Storytime is here.*

Rhyme: “Five little Sheep”

*5 little sheep
Were over in the field
Over in the field at
play.
Along came a hungry _____,
And chased one sheep away.*



*4 little sheep... Along came a wiggly _____,
And chased one sheep away.
3 little sheep... Along came a flying _____,
And chased one sheep away.
2 little sheep... Along came a jumping _____.
And chased one sheep away.
1 little sheep... Along came a giant _____.
And chased one sheep away.*

*Then no little sheep
Were over in the field
Over in the field at play.
Where do you think the little sheep went
When they all baaaaaaa-ed away?*

Song: "Put Your Thumb in the Air"—Joe Scruggs

*Put your thumb in the air and
shake it all around
Put your thumb in the air and
shake it all around
Put your thumb in the air and shake it
all around
Now put it on your head... and leave it
there.*



*Put your chin in the air and shake it all around
Now put it on your chest... and leave it there.*

*Put your elbow in the air and shake it all
around...
Now put it on your knee... and leave it there.*

*Put your tongue in the air and shake it all
around...
Now put it on your lip... and leave it there.*

*Put your bum in the air and shake it all around...
And now put it on the floor... and leave it there.*

Song: "Animals in the Jungle" (Tune of "Wheels on the Bus")

*The monkeys in the jungle go eek, eek, eek,
Eek, eek, eek, eek eek, eek.
The monkeys in the jungle go eek, eek, eek.
All day long.*

*The lions in the jungle go roar...
All day long.
The hippos in the jungle go splosh ...
All day long.
The 'gators in the
jungle go chomp...
All day long.*

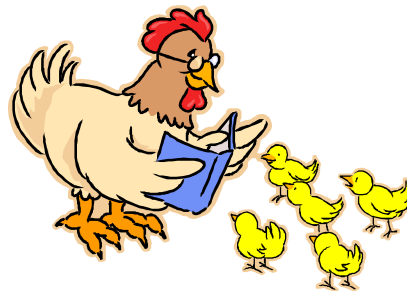


Song: (Tune of Frère Jacques)

*Gingerbread, Gingerbread,
Yum, yum, yum,
Yum, yum, yum.
I like gingerbread,
I like gingerbread,
In my tum,
In my tum.*

Poem: "The End" by Mary Ann Hoberman.

*We're at the end/ The Very End/The very,
very, very end./No More words/ Or pictures.
Look!/No more stories/In this book./But there
are other/ Books to read./
Hundreds/Thousands/ All we need./ Any
time/ In any weather/ We can sit / Right
down together/ In the shade/ Or in the sun/
Choose a book/ That looks like fun./ One
that's old/ Or one that's new./ Make-believe/
Or really true./ I'll read one line./ I'll read
two./ You'll read to me./ I'll read to you.*



Goodbye Song: (Tune of London Bridge)

*Now it's time to say goodbye,
Say goodbye, say goodbye,
Now it's time to say goodbye,
I'll see you all next week.*

RESOURCES

- Aardema, Verna. *How the Ostrich Got its Long Neck: A Tale from the Akamba of Kenya*. Ills. Marcia Brown. New York: Scholastic, 1995.
- Cobb, Jane. *I'm a Little Teapot!* Ills. Magda Lazicka. Vancouver: Black Sheep, 1996.
- Hicks, Doris Lynn and Sandy Weber Mahaffey. *Flannelboard Classic Tales*. Chicago: ALA, 1997.
- Hennessy, B.G. *The Boy Who Cried Wolf*. Ills. Boris Kulikov. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006.
- Hoberman, Mary Ann. *You Read to Me, I'll Read to You*. Ills. Michael Emberley. New York: Megan Tingley, 2001.
- Maddigan, Beth and Stefanie Drennan. *The Big Book of Reading, Rhyming, and Resources*. Ills. Roberta Thompson. Westport: Libraries Unlimited, 2005.
- Reid, Rob. *Family Storytime*. Chicago: ALA, 1999.
- Scruggs, Joe. *Deep in the Jungle*. Shadow Play, 1997.
- Warren, Jean. *More Piggyback Songs*. Ills. Marion Hopping Ekberg. Everett: Totline, 1984.

The Power of the Puppet

The Benefits and Joys of Using Puppets in the Public Library

LIBR 527- Services for Children
April Ens

The use of puppetry in children's programming is exciting and powerful, and boasts unique benefits for storytellers and children both. The world of a child is rich, creative, and full of life. Dolls, stuffed animals, and even marbles or string can be imbued with personalities and cast as the actors in an imaginary scenario. Storytelling with puppets allows librarians to tap into this well of imagination and offer children a tangible symbol of the creative world. While many children above a certain age know at some level that a puppet is not technically alive, they also know that they can dream it alive. Even older children will allow themselves to be swept up in the fun and take turns shaking hands with a puppet after a show (Frey 3). Storytelling with puppets connects the librarian with one of the ways that children naturally play, so using puppets to help tell a story taps into a world that will be familiar to many children (Walters, 48). Puppets don't need to be fancy or elaborate to achieve this affect. Experience has shown that the simpler a puppet is, the easier it may be to engage a child's imagination (Frey 3).

The inclusion of a puppet in a storytelling session transforms the oral art into a richer sensory experience (Champlin, 6). The puppet is an active participant that can be seen, touched, and heard. The stories themselves can be delivered as dialogue between the librarian and the puppet, providing the audience with an interactive exchange rather than a passive reading. Gestures or body language such as a snobbishly upturned nose, or a well-chosen tone of voice can flesh out characters and enliven stories (Champlin, 5).

Research with primary school children suggests that the use of a puppet in educational lessons can engage children and increase their memory recall afterwards (Carollo, 25). Walter Minkel claims that even older children and adults will remember a presentation better if a puppet is used, provided that the puppet character is taken seriously and treated as a unique personality (41). While most librarians do not seek for their audiences of any age to memorize their programs, they certainly wish the children to experience a high level of engagement. If that engagement should result in a child spending the next week singing "five little monkeys" because the puppet sang it with her, then an unanticipated joy has been achieved.

Nancy Renfro believes that allowing children to handle the puppets after if not during a story greatly increases the impression that children take away with them (20). Children empathize with a puppet character during the telling of a story and touching it can reinforce their "warm memories" of the experience (20). Renfro proposes that the slightness and defencelessness of puppets helps children get in touch with a sense of empathy, and empathy is, in turn, foundational for learning and the development of personality (1). Mullenbach agrees that handling the puppets may allow children to better identify with and listen to them more carefully (25). I would suggest that this effect may also be explained in

part by tactile memory. Some people learn better visually, some orally, and some by touch. Including each of these elements in a storytelling program is likely to help a librarian connect with the greatest number of children.

The attention-grabbing power of the puppet can be harnessed throughout a storytelling program, guiding children to participate in an activity, to sit down, or to listen to the next story. Children may take better directions from a puppet than they would from an adult (Church 45). This could be helpful in particular for new librarians who are looking for a smooth way to transition between activities or a gentle way to ask an overactive youngster to keep his or her voice down for the benefit of everyone else.

Engaging or fascinating children may be particularly powerful when storytelling to young children who are still developing the skills necessary to follow a whole story on its own. Children participate in “symbolic play” before the development of language, and puppetry and other dramatic arts inherently involve such symbolism (Carollo, 7). Thus, the non-verbal movements and interactions modeled by a puppet may help a child to follow a story better than he or she would by language alone. The symbolic language of puppetry can reach out to children who are still developing listening skills, and speak to children who don’t speak English at home and are still developing a familiarity with the sounds, rhythms, and vocabulary of the English language.

A warm or compelling puppet can help guide shy children out of their shells. While an adult stranger may seem intimidating or frightening, a puppet is approachable and undemanding. Nancy Renfro recommends using puppets as empathetic library mascots that can provide an intermediary between librarians and children while they are still getting acquainted (Renfro 10). This may be particularly helpful for a librarian to remember in a time when many public libraries offer drop-in storytime sessions that attract highly variable audiences. If a librarian doesn’t have the opportunity to get to know each child and develop a personal relationship, then maybe a puppet can help him or her make an immediate connection and the child can leave the library with a memory of warmth and fun.

Children are not the only ones who can be shy. Puppets can also help librarians combat their own shyness. Library school does not train us all into natural performers and it can be intimidating to stand in front of an audience, regardless of age, expecting to be entertained. Using a puppet redirects the attention from the librarian to the puppet on his or her arm (Frey, 3), and provides the storyteller with a level of anonymity (Chaplin, 5). As Connie Chaplin so eloquently summarizes, “the puppet becomes a transparent shield behind which the storyteller may “disappear,” freeing herself or himself to experiment with elements of the presentation” (5).

Puppetry can be used to expand the traditional storytelling experience to provide a powerful stage for mirroring children’s experiences and working through difficult situations and real dilemmas in a safe, unthreatening situation (Frey 3). Unicef’s puppet programs have discovered that “an audience will accept from a puppet what would cause offence or embarrassment if it came from a live actor” (McIntyre 2). The puppet does not come with the baggage of an actor and can “get away with” enacting difficult situations and negative personae to engage children to learn difficult lessons (4). Unicef has seen or used puppets in various parts of the world to teach about aids, tuberculosis, vaccines, sanitation, sexual

abuse, mental handicaps, and peace (McIntyre 1, 2, 9, 34, 40, 42). As contemporary Canadian society is very diverse, Canadian libraries may wish to feature stories that involve empathy, tolerance, and understanding of differences. Puppets with speech impediments, physical handicaps, or minority ethnic backgrounds can teach children understanding and empathy. Libraries can choose to introduce children to such difficult topics in a safe environment. Stories can be as complex and deep or as light and fun as the puppeteer chooses.

Most storytime programs at libraries are designed for children of preschool ages and younger. Puppet shows can be performed for preschoolers, but can also entertain and teach children up to ages ten or eleven (Frey 4). The scripts of puppet shows introduce children to literature and dramatic styles. Viewing these plays teaches listening, concentration, literary analysis, the necessity of speaking clearly and expressively when performing, and proper audience participation (4, 5).

Librarians can use puppets to “tell” stories in tandem with them, to present fairytales or other scenarios as puppet shows, or to develop cultural awareness. They can harness the power of the puppet to reach out to children and make them feel welcome, warm, and safe. They can capture the imagination of their audiences to breathe new life into stories and new power into language. Librarians can encourage children to empathize with the characters of a puppet show and think about their own worlds differently. Puppets are creative tools with very few limits, and a perfect partner for a children’s librarian, whether he or she is shy or a natural ham in front of a crowd. Children’s programs are about connecting through story, and about having fun. There is little so fun or so fascinating as speaking to children through the mouth of a puppet.

Works Cited:

- Carollo, Annemarie. Creating Common Ground: Enhancing Elementary Education for All Learners Through the Use of Puppetry. 2003. Retrieved November 16, 2006. U of British Columbia Library. Proquest Theses and Dissertations.
- Champlin, Connie. Storytelling with Puppets, 2nd ed. Chicago: American Library Association, 1998.
- Church, Ellen Booth. “Using Puppets as Language-Building Partners.” Scholastic Early Childhood Today. 16 no. 2, October 2004. p 45-46. Retrieved November 16, 2004. U of British Columbia Library. Library Literature & Information Science.
- Frey, Yvonne Amar. One-Person Puppetry Streamlined & Simplified: With 38 Folktale Scripts. Chicago: ALA, 2005.
- McIntyre, Peter. Puppets with a Purpose: Using Puppetry for Social Change. Penang, Malaysia: Southbound, 1998.
- Minkel, Walter. “Pulling Strings.” School Library Journal. 47 no. 8 August 2001. p. 41. Retrieved November 16, 2006. U of British Columbia Library. Library Literature & Information Science

Mullenbach, Martha. Testing the Use of Puppets for Story Retention. July 1999. Retrieved November 25, 2006. U of British Columbia Library. Academic Search Premier.

Renfro, Nancy. A Puppet Corner in Every Library. Austin, Texas: Nancy Renfro Studios, 1978.

Walters, Maude Owens. Puppet Shows for Home and School. New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1929.



Public Library Screen Media Resources

for Babies and Toddlers

Submitted by Bill Caskey, Children's Librarian, Richmond Public Library

Public library programming such as baby time, toddler time, and outreach efforts such as the Parent-Child Mother Goose Program promote caregivers' and parents' interaction with children through songs, rhymes, and play in order to facilitate language development and healthy brain development. This kind of programming is arguably some of the most valuable that libraries and other organizations provide since it promotes healthy emotional and intellectual brain development when babies' brains are growing most rapidly. Yet libraries offer a resource to parents and caregivers that, when used as intended, may actually stifle brain development for children under two years of age even though the products imply a claim to do just the opposite. Video media products aimed at babies and toddlers such as those in the Baby Einstein line have, for nearly ten years, been a growth industry for their producers, even if they don't benefit brain growth for their intended audience. Given the demand for these video resources from parents and the potential harm in presenting them to children younger than two years old, how should public libraries proceed in collecting and marketing the resources?

The fastest growing market for screen media have the fastest growing brains. Infants and toddlers are spending ever more time with screen media (Rideout, 2003). Anderson and Pempek write, "As a society, we are engaged in a vast and uncontrolled experiment with our infants and toddlers, plunging them into home environments that are saturated with electronic media. We should try to understand what we are doing and what are the consequences" (2005, 519). According to the Washington Post, "the baby-video market is booming, with more than \$1 billion in sales so far in videos aimed at children two and younger. Baby Einstein, owned by Walt Disney Co., has the largest share of the market, and sales last year reached \$200 million" (Mayer, 2006). The Baby Einstein product line is number one in Disney's infant category and boasts video titles such as *Baby Mozart: Music Festival* and *Baby Newton: Discovering Shapes* (Arnold, 2005).

One DVD series marketed to the parents and caregivers of babies is called *Your Baby Can Read*. On its website, the Infant Learning Company claims that viewing the video "helps your child learn to recognize words, stimulates brain development, makes learning fun and interactive, encourages early language acquisition, gives you an effective tool to stimulate your child, teaches reading during the window of opportunity for learning language, and entertains your child with children, animals, sing-along songs, and poems" (Products, 2006).

Of course, the best way to stimulate babies' fast-growing brains so they're prepared to learn most effectively is to actually sing, tell stories, play with, and read to babies and toddlers. The bond that's established when parents and caregivers interact with their little ones using language in these authentic and emotionally rich ways has been shown to benefit young brains. Watching pixels change on a screen and listening to recorded sounds has not been shown to benefit brain growth. According to Michael Rich, director of the Campaign on Media and Child Health at Children's Hospital Boston which studies the effects of media on children:

What is optimal for brain development is three features: connecting and bonding with other human beings; interacting with their physical environment, such as stacking blocks, playing in the mud or getting a Cheerio into their mouth; and creative, problem-solving play," he says. "All these people have done is create a wonderful electronic babysitter that, under guise of education, is guilt-free. There has been zero research on the educational value of this material for infants (Arnold, 2005).

Although there's no evidence that video media provide what growing brains need, there is growing evidence the videos stifle healthy brain development. A recent study at the University of Washington Child Health Institute found that television viewing among infants and toddlers is associated with irregular sleep schedules, an association long established for older children (Thompson, 2005). And a study of 6 to 7 month olds that sought to clarify whether infants "perceive televised stimuli in the same way to live stimuli" suggests that the human brain has a different response to the real world than to the virtual world (Shimada and Hiraki, 2006).

Very young babies' brains may actually be over-stimulated by screen media; thus it is not age-appropriate. Dimitri Christakis, co-director of the Child Health Institute at the University of Washington, points to the possibility that just because children's eyes are glued to the screen doesn't mean babies' brains are benefiting. Christakis says, "there's reason to believe these products have deleterious effects on the developing mind" (Paul, 2006).

The incredible growth of video products for infants and toddlers since the late 1990s has occurred in parallel with a growing awareness that the best diet for fast-growing brains doesn't include screen media programming. The American Academy of Pediatrics has recommended to parents "no more than one to two hours of quality TV and videos a day for older children and no screen time for children under the age of 2". (AAP, 2006). "Children, Adolescents, and Television", a policy statement from the AAP, contains "specific recommendations for pediatricians to incorporate media education and advocacy into their anticipatory guidance and parental education" (Gentile, 2005). The recommendations include the following: "Parents should discourage TV viewing for children younger than two years of age and should encourage more interactive activities that promote proper brain development, such as talking, playing, singing, and reading together" (AAP, 2001).

The Canadian Pediatric Society (CPS) spells out some of the risks of too much screen time for little ones: "Television viewing frequently limits children's time for vital activities such as playing, reading, learning to talk, spending time with peers and family, storytelling, participating in regular exercise, and developing other necessary physical, mental and social skills" (CPS, 2002). The CPS goes on to recommend the Media Awareness Network as the primary media advisory group in Canada. The Media Awareness Network echoes both the CPS advice as well as the AAP guidelines.

In light of the AAP guidelines, the Campaign for a Commercial Free Childhood has sued Baby Einstein for falsely claiming that Baby Einstein video products make kids smarter (Mayer, 2006). Presumably, a successful suit against the market leader would persuade smaller companies such as the Infant Learning Company and the multitude of other producers to re-evaluate their sales pitches. Tiny Tot Sports' videos claim to "help fight childhood obesity with its DVDs about baseball, basketball, golf, soccer and football for "ages 0-4" while Baby Bumblebee claims to rely on "a scientifically well-established teaching method," that will "build your baby's brain" with DVDs devoted to vocabulary building and numbers for children from 4 to 11 months old (CCFC, 2005).

Susan Linn, a psychologist at Judge Baker Children's Center and Harvard Medical School, says: "Essentially, the baby video industry is a scam. There's no evidence that the videos are educational for babies, and a review of the research on babies and videos concludes that while older babies can imitate simple actions from a video they've seen several times, they learn much more rapidly from real life" (CCFC, 2005). According to the Kaiser Family Foundation study, "A Teacher in the Living Room?" video production companies do essentially no research to back up claims of benefits to little viewers (Paul, 2006).

The Baby Einstein website addresses the AAP guidelines on its website:

...while we respect the American Academy of Pediatrics, we do not believe that their recommendation of no television for children under the age of two reflects the reality of today's parents, families and households – for example, a recent Kaiser Family Foundation study found that 68% of all babies under two years old watch screen media on any given day (Baby Einstein, 2006).

The company's argument seems to be that, even though they've helped to create and continue to reinforce the problem of nearly seven in ten babies under the age of two watching screen media on a daily basis, it's the new (and profitable) reality and so the AAP guidelines don't apply.

Since the AAP advisory, there has been little research as to how much screen time babies under two are exposed. However, a 2004 study by Pierroutsakos, Hanna, Self, Lewis, and Brewer surveyed the viewing habits of the little ones:

Parents of 100 infants, ranging in age from two-and-a-half to 24 months, were asked to complete a diary tracking the infants' TV exposure. On average, parents reported that their infants were exposed to about 120 minutes of TV per day, 50% of which was infant and toddler programming, 40% adult programming, and 9% preteen programming. In addition, parents reported that the child attended to about 60 minutes of TV per day, or about half of their total exposure time" (Anderson, 507, 2005).

In addition to its suit against Baby Einstein, the Campaign for a Commercial Free Childhood has asked the United States Federal Trade Commission to require that baby video production companies "clearly and conspicuously disclose the academy's recommendations on their advertising and packaging". The Federal Trade Commission had, as of May 2006, made no comment on the CCFC complaint (Mayer, 2006). Until video companies agree to place warning labels on product packages, libraries should do more to let parents know that children under two shouldn't be subjected to screen media. One option would be for libraries to provide appropriately conspicuous signage near displays of videos produced for infants and toddlers.

If there is no such thing as age-appropriate video media for children under two years of age, should libraries provide them at all? Is a collection development and marketing policy that includes marketing of videos such as Baby Einstein and "Your Baby Can Read" actually irresponsible with respect to public health? What if we choose not to carry the videos? Is that censorship or just good selection policy? Parents demand the products. Baby Einstein products are consistent Parent's Choice winners, a criteria that is included in some public libraries' collection development policies. No doubt, reviews of video resources like those in the Baby Einstein line include the true statement, "This would be a popular addition to large public library collections". How should libraries balance their mandate to provide popular materials while supporting healthy brain development in early childhood? As in every other case, censorship of materials based on perceived harm is not a sensible option. There are at least as many uses for a library resource as there are users. Indeed, I turned to my local public library for resources such as *Your Baby Can Read* for the writing of this article.

Of course, the AAP's Media Guidelines suggest that parents take an active media education role in their children's lives. Activities such as watching music videos together and looking for gender stereotypes or asking children if they know the name of a tobacco or alcohol product elicits discussion about advertising and media. Encouraging children to "talk back" critically to the screen and to become information literate is an essential role for parents and caregivers. Librarians can play an important role in providing quality video resources for children over two and their parents. Librarians provide good advice to library users when they are seeking quality resources for their children of any age. Based on what we know about how viewing moving image media harms brain development, we should recommend other kinds of media for children under two.

Reviews that respond to accepted media guidelines as well as signage near moving image resources and media guideline suggestions in the catalogue would be good advisory efforts for public libraries to take. Literacy kits distributed to children at birth and at well-child visits should include media use guidelines along with book giveaways and an invitation to apply for a library card. Library professional associations should develop best practices guidelines for the collection and marketing of this controversial resource. Well thought out advisory guidelines for librarians could provide needed support in order to make a troublesome collection and marketing problem a little easier to deal with.

Works Cited

- American Academy of Pediatrics. Committee on Public Education. "American Academy of Pediatrics: Children, Adolescents, and Television." *Pediatrics*; *Pediatrics* 107.2 (2001): 423-6.
- American Academy of Pediatrics. Media Guidelines for Parents. Available at: http://www.aap.org/pubed/ZZZGVL4PQ7C.htm?&sub_cat=17. Accessed 17, November, 2006.
- Anderson, Daniel R., and Tiffany A. Pempek. "Television and very Young Children." *American Behavioral Scientist* 48.5 (2005): 505-22.
- Arnold, Thomas K. "Edutainment: Smart Programming?" *USA Today* 8/23/2005 2005, sec. D: D4.
- Baby Einstein. About Us, Children and Electronic Media. Available at: http://www.babyeinstein.com/about/01-01_aboutus.asp Accessed: 30 November, 2006.
- Campaign for a Commercial Free Childhood(CCFC). "Are 'educational' baby videos a scam?" Available at: <http://www.commercialfreechildhood.org/news/babyvideoscaml.htm> Accessed 29 November, 2006.
- Canadian Paediatric Society (CPS), Psychosocial Paediatrics Committee. Impact of media use on children and youth. *Paediatrics & Child Health* 2003; 8(5): 301-306. Available at: <http://www.cps.ca/English/statements/PP/pp03-01.htm> Accessed 30 November, 2006.
- Canadian Paediatric Society (CPS), Healthy Active Living for Children and Youth Advisory Committee. Healthy active living for children and youth. *Paediatrics & Child Health* 2002; 7:339-45.
- Gentile, D. A., et al. "Well-Child Visits in the Video Age: Pediatricians and the American Academy of Pediatrics' Guidelines for Children's Media use." *Pediatrics*; *Pediatrics* 114.5 (2004): 1235-41.
- Mayer, Caroline E. "Group Sues Video Firms on Tot-Learning Claims." *Washington Post* May 2, 2006: D3.
- Paul, Pamela. "Want a Brainier Baby?" *Time*. 1/16/2006, Vol. 167 Issue 3, p104-109.
- Products. Your Baby Can Read! Infant Learning Company. Available at: <http://www.infantlearning.com/yourbabycanread.html>. Accessed 30 November, 2006.
- Rideout, VJ, Vandewater EA, Wartella EA. *Zero to Six: Electronic Media in the Lives of Infants, Toddlers, and Preschoolers*. Menlo Park, CA: Kaiser Family Foundation; 2003.

Shimada, Sotaro, and Kazuo Hiraki. "Infant's Brain Responses to Live and Televised Action." *NeuroImage* 32.2 (2006/8/15): 930-9.

Thakkar, Rupin R., Michelle M. Garrison, and Dimitri A. Christakis. "A Systematic Review for the Effects of Television Viewing by Infants and Preschoolers." *Pediatrics* 118.5 (2006): 2025-31.

Thompson, Darcy A., and Dimitri A. Christakis. "The Association between Television Viewing and Irregular Sleep Schedules among Children Less than 3 Years of Age." *Pediatrics* 116.4 (2005): 851-6.



Red Cedar Award Program 2006/2007

The Red Cedar Award program started in the fall, and schools and libraries continue to join the fun. Children across the province are busily reading this year's nominees, writing reviews online, and preparing to vote for their favourites in April. Find the books listed at:

www.redcedaraward.ca

Watch for voting information on the group leaders' website in April. After the votes are tallied, the winners are announced at the Red Cedar Award Gala.

This year's Gala will take place in Courtenay (Vancouver Island) on Saturday, May 12, and will feature an unprecedented number of authors. Gala ticket sales for registered groups will open on March 5.

Thank you to the hundreds of group leaders who have registered!

Sincerely,

Jennifer Caldwell, President

Young Readers' Choice Award Society of BC

What is the Problem?

Teens as “Problem” Patrons in Libraries

The teenagers are not **making out** behind the stacks, they are doing research. (At least, that’s what they said.)¹

Teenagers tend to be viewed as "problem" patrons in libraries. While most librarians are happy to see children, adults and seniors, they often balk at seeing teenagers. "Young adults are not a favored clientele in many libraries."² Patrick Jones and Joel Schumaker state:

The result is that adolescents are the bearers of a social "stigma" which categorizes them as "problems" even before they do anything. In service terms, this means that if they act and look like adults, they are taken seriously; if they act and look like adolescents, they are often viewed with suspicion, whether or not they deserve it.³

This holds true for many locations, not just the library. I easily remember being treated differently in many places when I was a teen. One store in particular would call security the moment that any teen walked in, and security would follow the teen around until they left. The result? Teens stopped going to that store and any other place that treated them like that.

This paper will look at why teens are viewed as "problem patrons" and what librarians and libraries can do to make teens feel welcome in the library.

Teens are not adults or children and they need to be treated accordingly. Many libraries have, or have had, very strict rules for teens. These can include signs about the maximum number of teens allowed at one table, or trying to ensure that teens are actually doing their homework when they are in the library. We would not limit the number of seniors that are permitted at one table, nor would we require that an adult patron be doing research for work. So why do we have these rules for teens?

Some of this comes from common myths about teens, which Patrick Jones and Joel Schumaker discuss.

The first myth, which can be traced back to the psychologist G. Stanley Hall, is that adolescence is a time of tumultuous upheaval, which must, at all costs, be kept under control. The second myth is that adolescents are children, which is neither true biologically nor cognitively, but proves useful to ideologues who want to “protect” young people and to adult-managed organizations who merely want to control their behavior, lump them in with other age categories, or make no extra effort to serve them. The third myth is that adolescents are homogeneous.⁴

Why do we keep to these myths when we know they are untrue? Is it easier to simply lump all teens together and label them “problems”? We need to look at our own attitudes and behaviours and recognize the ones that are based on myths stereotypes and biases. Then we need to change *our* attitudes so our libraries are welcoming to everyone, regardless of their age.

The bias against teens seems prevalent in the librarian profession. One case study in *Library Journal* opened with “Here comes the unholy trio.”⁵ This highly unflattering phrase was describing a trio of teenage males. The case study then went on to describe their “disruptive” behaviour. One teen was drinking from a water bottle (no eating or drinking permitted in the library), and one teen was playing a video game (no game playing in the library). There was a complaint about a third teen looking at porn, which could not actually be substantiated by the librarian, but the teen was banned from the library for a week.

What is actually problematic about the behaviours of the first two teens? More and more libraries are permitting patrons to bring drinks in, and in the scenario, the teen was sitting at a table, not browsing the stacks (if that should make a difference). “When the materials are checked out, you can be sure that wherever they are taken there will be beverages, food, and sometimes even pets!”⁶ While keeping the books in good condition is important, so is the comfort of our patrons and this needs to be kept in mind.

In the case of the second teen, the librarian could hear the noise of his video game. That could be annoying after a while, but would it not be better to ask the teen to turn the sound off on the game instead of telling him to put it away? In my local library, there are often patrons playing online games at the computers. The sound is turned off on the computers, so there is no noise disruption to anyone. In addition, isn't good that the teen is in the library, even if he is playing a video game? More libraries are starting to carry games and this can be a way to get teens interested in the library.

The case of the third teen is harder to deal with than the first two. From the description in the scenario, the computer screen was visible to the public. On the other hand, the librarian took it upon herself to "toggle back to the previous page" and see what the teen was looking at. Would she have done this if the complaint had been about an adult?

As for kicking the teenager out: paranoia plus contempt equals ethical negligence. Korbelt didn't see the teenager looking at the pornography, so no action should have been taken, except to thank the informant and wait for a chance to observe any offensive actions personally.⁷

This is good advice – no one should be banned on hearsay alone. The issue of the use of public computers in the library is an important one, but we need actual evidence to enforce our decisions. This is not only for explaining to the patron why they are being banned, but also for any legal issues that might arise from the situation.

Repeatedly, one of the biggest issues that come up is that teens tend to gather in groups and groups of teens can be noisy. "It is the "congregation" aspect – the wolf pack image – that causes the most problems for libraries."⁸ Libraries of the past were designed for solitary users, who looked quietly at their material and did not interact with anyone except the library staff.

In fact, withdrawal from friends is considered a risk factor in adolescent suicide and mental disorders; yet, most public libraries find adolescents in groups difficult to deal with, despite the fact that the groupings are both normal and healthy. Such groups are usually regarded as "rowdy" or likely to become "rowdy," and staff energy primarily goes into controlling them rather than assuming such groups are normal and preparing for them.⁹

The way that most people interact with libraries has now changed. "The idea – and the days – of the library as a quiet place to read or study are over."¹⁰ This does not mean that silence and solitude should be unattainable in a public library. Many libraries have special areas or whole floors for silent study as opposed to group study. This can take the form of a special room for one type of study, or re-designing the layout of the library to provide areas where people, not just teens, can talk while they are in the library without disturbing other patrons who want quiet. Libraries need to provide a balance of spaces, for groups and individuals, for silence and for noise.

Since few libraries are set up with young adults primarily in mind, normal adolescent behavior can often lead frustrated or frightened librarians to consider YAs to be troublemakers. A disruptive teenager can be unnerving, but most perceptions of young adults as troublemakers in libraries stem from unrealistic library regulations, frightened staff, or prejudicial attitudes towards youth.¹¹

What are libraries to do about teens? We need to make teens feel welcome in the library.

The material recommends a few basic ideas:

- Show respect
- Be approachable
- Be patient
- Be open-minded
- Be yourself
- Have a sense of humour
- Treat everyone equally
- Do not make assumptions

Librarians need to recognize that teens are individuals with their own interests, tastes and information needs. They are not children and do not need to be guided or protected from the big bad world. "As long as what young adults want is within the scope of the public library to provide, they have a right to it, free from the interference of others including the librarian."¹² Taking the information requests of teens seriously shows respect and that they are welcome in the library.

Everyone in a library, regardless of who they are, what age they are, how they are dressed or how they talk should be treated equally. Many of the problems that teens have with libraries arise from unequal enforcement of library rules. If a teen is not permitted to have a bottle of water in a library, then an adult patron who “just ran in for a minute” should be asked to leave their coffee behind too. If teens have to keep to certain noise levels, then adults and children need to keep to certain levels as well and teens will want to see this enforced.

In addition, library staff need to be prepared to explain the reasoning behind policies. Teens question authority – it is just a part of being a teen. They want to know why they are being told to do or not to do something. Telling a group of teens to put their drinks away just because that is library policy is not going to work. It tells them they are not important enough to be given a reason and that they are not wanted in that space.

Most “problem” behaviours of teens are simply normal teen behaviour. Familiarize yourself with it. Question your own attitudes and behaviours and change those first. Get to know the teens in your library. Get the interested teens involved in the library. Provide a way for all teens to give feedback to the library. Accept that some of that feedback will include profanity. Examine the design and layout of your library with teens in mind (and hopefully with the teens themselves). Provide a variety of programs for teens. Once you begin planning for teens in your library and recognizing that teens are a distinct and varied group of individuals, many of the perceived “problems” will no longer exist. There will still be some teens that are genuine problems, just as there will still be some adults and some children who are genuine problems. Deal with all the real problem behaviours equitably. And remember, teens do become adults in the end.

Public libraries focus on designing programming for children – story hours and summer reading programs are offered (in part) because “children will be tax-paying library supporters one day,” and librarians want children to have good memories of times spent at the library. But we forget, children become teenagers before they become tax-paying adults, and it’s during this stage that children who once blindly craved reading stickers and stamps begin developing their own ideas of what a public library means to them.¹³

Antagonizing the teens of today with unnecessary rules and restrictions is not a recipe for serving and maintaining the support of the adults of tomorrow. Libraries exist to serve a much greater purpose than profit, but if they're going to be able to keep serving them in the future, they have to be places where people would want to spend their time.¹⁴

Libraries are a place for everyone, regardless of who they are or what age group they belong to. The teens of today will be the adults of tomorrow and we want them to have good memories of the library as an open and inclusive public space.

Daphne Hamilton- Nagorsen is a student in the MAS/MLIS program in the School of Library, Archival and Information Studies at the University of British Columbia. This paper was written for LIBR 527: Services for Children

Endnotes:

¹ Warrior Librarian, "Politically Correct Library Terms for the 21st Century"; <http://www.warriorlibrarian.com/LIBLAUGHS/politicallycorrect.html>; accessed 29 November 2006.

² Patrick Jones and Joel Shoemaker, *Do It Right! Best Practices for Serving Young Adults in School and Public Libraries* (New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers Inc, 2001), 1.

³ Ibid., 2.

⁴ Ibid., 3.

⁵ Michael Rogers, "When in Doubt, Throw 'Em Out?" *Library Journal* 131 (2006): 82.

⁶ Ibid., 84.

⁷ Ibid., 84.

⁸ Beth McNeil and Denise J. Johnson, *Patron Behavior in Libraries: A Handbook of Positive Approaches to Negative Situations* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1996), 45.

⁹ Mary K. Chelton, "The "Problem Patron" Public Libraries Created," *Reference Librarian* 75/76 (2002): 26.

¹⁰ Michael Rogers, "When in Doubt, Throw 'Em Out?" *Library Journal* 131 (2006): 82.

¹¹ Renée J. Vaillancourt, *Bare Bones Young Adult Services: Tips for Public Library Generalists* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2000), 79.

¹² Ibid., 75-6.

¹³ Michael Rogers, "When in Doubt, Throw 'Em Out?" *Library Journal* 131 (2006): 84.

¹⁴ Ibid

References:

Chelton, Mary K. "The "Problem Patron" Public Libraries Created," *Reference Librarian* 75/76 (2002): 23-32.

Holt, Glen E. and Leslie E. "Setting and Applying Appropriate Rules Governing Patron Behaviour." *Public Library Quarterly* 24 (2005): 73-85.

Isaacson, David. "No Problem with Problem Patrons." *Library Journal* 131 (2006): 68.

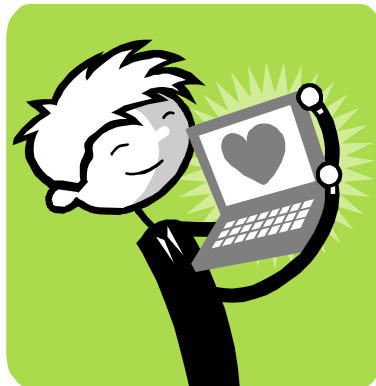
Jones, Patrick and Joel Shoemaker, *Do It Right! Best Practices for Serving Young Adults in School and Public Libraries*. New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers Inc, 2001.

McNeil, Beth and Denise J. Johnson, *Patron Behavior in Libraries: A Handbook of Positive Approaches to Negative Situations* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1996), 45.

Rogers, Michael. "When in Doubt, Throw 'Em Out?" *Library Journal* 131 (2006): 82, 84.

Vaillancourt, Renée J. *Bare Bones Young Adult Services: Tips for Public Library Generalists*. Chicago: American Library Association, 2000.

Warrior Librarian. "Politically Correct Library Terms for the 21st Century"; <http://www.warriorlibrarian.com/LIBLAUGHS/politicallycorrect.html>; accessed 29 November 2006.



Getting Your Feet Wet With Graphic Novels

Submitted by Laurel Bieber, Information Assistant, Mission/Pitt Meadow Libraries, Fraser Valley Regional Library

If you aren't familiar with graphic novels, trying to get familiar with them can be overwhelming. There are just so many titles! Where do you start? How do you tell what's good for which age? You could just dive in and try to read everything, but since you probably don't have the time to do that, this article will discuss the various types of graphic novels, with suggestions for each type. It won't be an exhaustive list but hopefully it will be enough to help you get your feet wet.

Most people, even if they've never read a graphic novel or a comic in their lives, think of superheroes when they hear the term graphic novel. There's a lot more out there than just superheroes, but it's a good place to start.

Most superhero graphic novels are actually collections of superhero comics which are usually put out monthly by a number of publishers, such as DC and Marvel. Each company has numerous artists and writers working for it, which is what makes it so hard to judge age-appropriateness. Who writes what title changes all the time, so a title you thought great for under-12's may turn out in later volumes to be a bad choice for that age group. It all depends on who is writing.

Generally speaking, Batman is a better choicer for the 14+ crowd. Batman frequently goes up against psychopaths and sociopaths, making it a much darker title than many other superhero titles. Some of the best mini-series are Batman titles. Batman : Hush is a recent and excellent example, which I have booktalked to Grades 8 and up.

Marvel has reissued some of their original superhero comics under the word "essential": Essential Spider-man, Essential X-Men, and so on. In spite of all the golly-gees and dated clothes, Essential Spider-man is just as engaging today as it was when it first came out. It is fun and a good choice for younger teens and pre-teens. Brian Michael Bendis has since revamped and updated those original comics into Ultimate Spider-man, also a good choice for the younger crowd.

Graphic novels are a wonderful medium for fantasy stories, and many artists have taken advantage of this. Bone is about the three Bone brothers who get run out of town and end up lost in a strange valley populated by an assortment of interesting characters, a hoard of stupid, stupid rat creatures and a menacing evil. Bone is great for all ages. It's made the rounds with many of the staff where I work, and I think every 10-year-old boy in town has come in asking for it.

If you are looking for fantasy for girls, try Meridian by Barbara Kesel. It is one of the few comics written for girls, by a woman, and does an admirable job. After her father's death, both Sophie and her uncle find themselves marked with mystical symbols that give them new powers. Sophie's uncle wants to use his powers to take over the world, and Sophie stands in his way. Meridian is a good choice for tweens and younger teens.

Graphic novels have also turned out to be the perfect medium for autobiographies. Marjane Satrapi's Persepolis, her story of growing up in Iran after the Islamic Revolution, is by turns horrific and hilarious. I have booktalked this to Grades 10-12 and I always recommend it to adults. Art Spiegelman's powerful Maus won a Pulitzer Prize Special Award in 1992 and remains another excellent choice for teens and adults.

Wordless graphic novels go over well with Garfield fans. Gon, by Masashi Tanaka, is about a small dinosaur who has adventures all over the world with different animals. The art is detailed and realistic, but still manages to give each animal a personality. Despite the lack of words, you can always tell what they're thinking and feeling. Owly is named after the main character: a little owl who desperately wants a friend. All the other animals are afraid of him, but he eventually rescues and befriends a worm. Owly is probably the sweetest graphic novel out there and will make you smile even if you're a cranky old grump.

Science fiction titles abound if you are only interested in Star Wars and Star Trek. Other than that the field is much smaller. Geisha, the story of an android adopted, raised and nurtured as if she were an ordinary child, is an interesting addition to the field. Jomi, the android, is now "grown up" and an artist, but no one will take her seriously as such because she is not human. Geisha is most likely to appeal to older teens.

For pre-teens, check out Akiko. Fourth grader Akiko is visited by her friends from outer space (they arrive in a flying ice cream truck), who have come to ask for her help rescuing the Prince of Smoo, who has been kidnapped. The humour, snappy dialogue, sky pirates and assorted, sometimes disgusting creatures make this an appealing read.

Manga is the Japanese word for comics. In North America it is used to describe any Japanese comic. Manga is sometimes called *anime*, but *anime* is actually Japanese animation. The Japanese often turn their most popular manga into *anime*, which means that some titles are both. Because Japanese reads right to left, some publishers are printing their manga back to front to preserve the original artwork. It's only confusing for the first 10 minutes or so of the book. Honest!

Like many North American graphic novels, manga is divided up into many different genres, as well as being aimed at a wide variety of audiences. Genre and audience cross-overs are quite common, though.

The thing to be aware of with manga is that the Japanese have different cultural mores than we do, and this is reflected in manga. Nudity, if it is appropriate to the situation (e.g. girl in a bathtub), or if it will embarrass the character (e.g. girl being accidentally spotted while naked in a bathtub) is perfectly acceptable in manga. Other situations we might consider offensive aren't treated as such either, so much manga tends to be suitable for an older audience, and some of your more conservative patrons might not appreciate it at all. The publishers are pretty good about putting age-levels on their books though, which is very helpful.

A lot of manga features cross-dressing. If the number of titles that have it is any indication, the Japanese find it endlessly amusing. Sometimes it's a method to embarrass a character, and sometimes it drives the whole series, such as in Ranma ½. Ranma was a normal boy until he fell into a cursed spring. Now he turns into a girl when splashed with cold water and back into a boy when doused with hot water. Ranma ½ is full of martial arts silliness, with things like a combat pairs figure skating competition. It is lots of fun and suitable for teens.

There is a huge genre of action stories written for boys, but they also appeal to the girls. Many of these feature teenaged guys battling opponents for power, whether with cards (as in Yu-Gi-Oh!), weapons or magic. Many of these titles incorporate an element of magic. Some of these titles have extremely simplistic plots that consist almost entirely of fight rounds at a tournament, with the hero gaining strength, skill or power after each victory. Bleach is one of the ones that does not fall into the trap. Ichigo becomes a soul reaper after a badly injured soul reaper transfers her powers to him. Now Ichigo must help fight vicious hollows who like to feed on living souls.

One of the most popular titles is InuYasha, also a cartoon (anime) on TV. InuYasha falls under the time travel category. In it, schoolgirl Kagome falls down an old well and ends up in ancient Japan. She soon discovers that she is the reincarnation of a priestess and must collect the scattered shards of the Shikon jewel before they fall into the wrong hands. InuYasha is the very reluctant half-demon who is supposed to help her.

Another good time travel title is Red River. Shortly after her first kiss, Yuri is pulled through a puddle into the ancient Hittite empire by an evil queen who wants to make her a human sacrifice. Yuri's only hope of getting home again is a powerful sorcerer, who just happens to be a handsome young prince.

Straight forward historical manga is also available, as well. Rurouni Kenshin is set in Japan during the Meiji period (late 1800's to early 1900's) and concerns a wandering samurai, Kenshin, who was once a feared assassin named Hitokiri Battosai. Kenshin has since vowed never to kill again, and carries a special sword with the cutting edge on the wrong side to ensure that he keeps his vow. The Meiji period was a time of great change, which gives the manga plenty of scope for political plots and conflicts. The publisher rates Rurouni Kenshin as suitable for older teens; I would recommend it to anyone 14 or older.

Shojo is the name for manga written specifically for girls. This includes all sorts of genres, but one of the most common types is the realistic school girl story. Yuu Watase, who usually does fantasy manga, has also created a lovely little series called Imadoki! Country girl Tanpopo struggles to make friends at a large city school filled with extremely rich and snobby students. Imadoki! is suitable for all teens.

Kare Kano : his and her circumstances falls into the same category as Imadoki! At school, Yukino is the perfect student: kind, helpful, popular, smart, and athletic; but when she is at home, her true colours show. Yukino lives for other people's praise and admiration, which is why she tries so hard to be the perfect student. Then she starts high school and meets Soichiro, who quickly steals the top spot from her. Yukino is out for revenge...until she starts to fall for Soichiro. Kare Kano has humour, romance and—something some other manga titles neglect—characters that grow and change with every lesson learned.

Mecha is basically giant robots with people inside piloting them. Gundam Seed Astray is often asked for, but my favourite is Neon Genesis Evangelion, in which a young boy is forced to pilot a mecha against huge robotic “angels” bent on destroying Earth. Neon Genesis Evangelion stands out because of its complex, well-developed characters.

So, now that you've got your feet wet, why not wade a little deeper and read some for yourself? If you're looking for more suggestions, YALSA (www.ala.org/ala/yalsa/booklistsawards/booklistsbook.htm) has created a list of recommended titles, and No Flying No Tights (www.noflyingnotights.com) reviews graphic novels several times a year. It even groups them by age. Have fun swimming!

Bibliography

Essential X-Men. New York : Marvel Comics, 1996.

Bendis, Brian Michael. Ultimate Spider-man : Power and Responsibility. New York : Marvel Comics, 2002.

Chiba, Tomohiro Gundam Seed Astray. Los Angeles : Tokyopop, c2004.

Chinohara, Chie. Red River. San Francisco, Calif. : Viz, 2004.

Crilley, Mark. Akiko. Stanhope, N.J. : Sirius Entertainment, 1997.

Kesel, Barbara. Meridian : Flying Solo. Oldsmar, Fla : CrossGen Comics, 2001.

Kubo, Tite. Bleach. San Francisco, Calif. : VIZ Media, 2005.

Lee, Stan. Essential Spider-man. New York : Marvel Comics, 2002.

Loeb, Jeph. Batman : Hush. New York : DC Comics, 2003.

Sadamoto, Yoshiyuki. Neon Genesis Evangelion. San Francisco, CA : Viz, 1995.

Satrapi, Marjane. Persepolis. New York : Pantheon Books, 2003.

Smith, Jeff. Bone : out from Boneville. Columbus OH : Cartoon, 1996.

Spiegelman, Art. Maus. New York : Pantheon Books, 1997.

Takahashi, Kazuki. Yu-Gi-Oh! San Francisco : Viz, 2004.

Takahashi, Rumiko. InuYasha. San Francisco, Calif. : Viz, 2003.

---. Ranma ½. San Francisco : Viz Communications, 2003.

Tanaka, Masashi. Gon. New York : Paradox Press, 2001.

Thaler, Mike. Owly. New York : Harper & Row ; Toronto : Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1982.

Tsuda, Masami. Kare Kano : his and her circumstances. Los Angeles : Tokyopop, 2003.

Watase, Yuu. Imadoki! San Francisco, Calif. : VIZ, 2005.

Watson, Andi. Geisha. Portland, OR : Oni Press, 1999.

Watsuki, Nobuhiro. Rurouni Kenshin. San Francisco, CA : VIZ, 2005.



Friends and Food Preschool Story Time

Submitted by Bill Caskey to SLAIS Library Services for Children # 527



Program

Mbira opening-Instrument from Zimbabwe and other African nations often played at social gatherings and ceremonies. Also known as the kalimba.

Opening song-“Hello Everyone”

Finger play Rhyme-“Cup of Tea”

Story One-*Prince Cinders*

Song- Rig a Jig Jig

Story Two- *Mama Don't Allow*

Song- “If I Knew You Were Coming”

Story Three- “Split Pea Soup” from *George and Martha*, by James Marshall

Song-“Wake up!”

Story Four- *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?*

Sign Song-“The More We Get Together”

Closing Song-“Goodbye Everyone”

Songs and Rhymes

“Hello Everyone”

Hello Everyone, hello everyone, hello everyone,
it's good to see you here.

Let's get ready for story time, let's get ready for story time, let's get ready for story time,
to read and sing and play.

Let's get ready for story time, let's get ready for story time, let's get ready for story time,
and have some fun today.

“Cup of Tea

Here’s a cup and here’s a cup and here’s a pot of tea.
Pour a cup and pour a cup and drink a cup with me.

“Rig a Jig Jig”

As I was walking down the street, down the street, down the street.

As I was walking down the street,
hi ho hi ho hi ho.

A nice new friend I chanced to meet, chanced to meet, chanced to meet.

A nice new friend I chanced to meet,
hi ho hi ho hi ho.

With a rig a jig jig and away we go, away we go, away we go.

Rig a jig jig and away we go, hi ho hi ho hi ho.

“If I Knew You Were Coming”

If I knew you were coming I’d have baked a cake, baked a cake, baked a cake.

If I knew you were coming I’d have baked a cake, baked a cake for you.

“Wake Up” – Woody Guthrie

Wake up, wake up wake up wake up. Wake up, wake up wake up wake up. Wake up,
wake up wake up wake up. Wake up, wake up wake up wake up.

Open eyes, open eyes, open eyes, open eyes. etc.

“The More We Get Together”

The more we get together, together, together;

the more we get together the happier we’ll be.

‘Cause your friends are my friends and my friends are your friends,

the more we get together the happier we’ll be.

The more we read together, together, together, the more we read together

the happier we’ll be.

“Goodbye Everyone”

Goodbye everyone, goodbye everyone, goodbye everyone,
we’ll see you all next time.

Merrily we roll along, roll along, roll along; merrily we roll along
across the deep blue sea.

Resources

Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See? Bill Martin, Jr. illus. by Eric Carle
New York: 1983, Henry Holt.

George and Martha. James Marshall. New York: 1972, Houghton Mifflin.

I’m a Little Teapot: Presenting Preschool Story time. Compiled by Jane
Cobb. Illus. Magda Lazicka. Vancouver: Black Sheep Press, 1996.

Mama Don’t Allow. Hurd, Thatcher. New York: Harper Collins, 1984.

*Smooth Road to London Town: Songs from the Parent Child Mother Goose
Program.* Kathy Reid Naimann. Toronto: The Program, 2001.

Twenty Grow Big Songs. Woody Guthrie. New York: HarperCollins, 1992.

The Gift of Storytelling

Submitted by Robert Max Tell Stelmach

Margaret Read MacDonald, author, librarian, and storyteller, in "The Storyteller's Start-up Book", outlines several lists of why we should tell stories - starting with her own list and following with those by Dr. Spencer Shaw, from "Storytelling For Young Listeners"; Pamela J. Cooper and Rives Collin from their book, "Look What happened to Frog: Storytelling in Education"; and Gail De Vos from "Storytelling For Young Adults". Ms. MacDonald concludes by inviting us to write our own personal reasons for telling stories.

About ten years ago, after first reading Ms. MacDonald's invitation, I created my own list of reasons why I tell stories. It is an extensive list that I will not quote here, though it may be read on my website at www.maxtell.ca. What I would like to speak about here is empowerment; the empowerment and the gift of reading through storytelling.

Let me start with a personal story. When I was young, I hated and feared books. I have a short term memory problem, probably as a result of falling out of a two-story window at eighteen months. My short term memory has been tested at a fifty percentile; not very conducive to learning how to read, since reading depends so much on memorization. Both the spelling and the meanings of words too often escaped me. The image I now have of my early experience as a reader is not of a butterfly fluttering just out of reach, but of a tiger jumping at me from the jungle. I was so frightened of books, I crossed my eyes when reading, making the task impossible.

Although I was not told stories or read to as a child, I loved singing. Luckily for me, I had a reasonably good voice, so that my choir teacher invited me, periodically, to lead the school choir in a song. If it were not for my love of singing, and the support and appreciation of my choir teacher, I might never have learned to read. But since I loved singing and most other kids (especially boys) did not, I ended up on a more level playing field. The task was also made easier because I only had to concentrate on a few words at a time and did far more listening than reading. Rhyme, rhythm, and the fact that others, particularly my choir teacher, liked my singing, also made the learning process easier, so much so that my poor memory never raised its ugly head in regard to song.

I was in grade eight when the importance of reading hit me like a baseball bat. The principal, Mr. H. D. Veres, called me into his office. He warned me against taking Liberal Arts in high school, and said that Industrial Arts was best for me. "Robert," he concluded rather sadly, "you'll never graduate from high school, let alone university."

I was shocked, but I also knew the facts – I was a lousy reader. At the time, I didn't know what Liberal Arts was, and had nothing against Industrial Arts, but knew the latter was not for me. So I decided to change my ways. But how?

The strange thing was; the answer came from a grade school drop-out.

At age sixteen, I had a summer job with a tile company. One day, we were short of work, so I was loaned out to another contractor to level gravel in the basement of a new house. A truckload of gravel had been dumped through a basement window. I was given a rake and shovel and told to get to work, levelling the gravel. I didn't mind the work; I enjoyed physical labour. But there was a problem.

As far as I know, back in the mid-sixties, at least in Ontario, where I lived, there was no such thing as portable toilets; and it was the custom of construction workers, at that time, to use the mounds of gravel in unfinished basements to do their business. I soon found proof of this and to get the job done, I had to concentrate on something else.

Much to my surprise, I started writing a poem in my head. It wasn't a long poem, so I worked it and re-worked it, until all of the gravel was raked flat.

I was soon heading home in the company van with the foreman of the tile company driving. It was a long drive home. Part way, I remembered my poem, found an old envelope on the floor of the van, and brushed off the dry mud. I found a broken pencil in the ashtray, bit it sharp, and scribbled my poem. Then the foreman asked what I had written. Utter embarrassment!

I stuffed the envelop into my pocket, then leaned my head against the right front window of the van, pretending, as any self-respecting teenager would have done, that I was deaf. Undeterred, the foreman pulled to the side of the road and told me that we weren't going anywhere unless I told him what I had written. After much kafuffle on my part, I admitted that I had written a poem. Still determined, he cajoled me into reading it out loud.

"Wonderful!" he said.

I was shocked.

"How many poems have you written?"

"Just one."

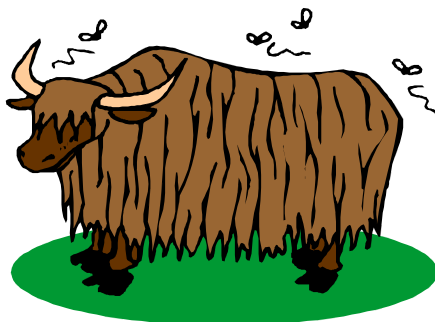
"I quit school when I was in grade two, but, I think you're a poet."

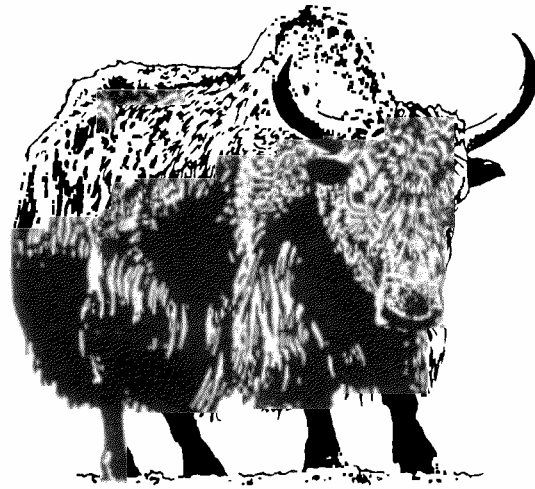
I'd never heard anything like it before in my life. Someone had told me I was something; not that I was stupid because I couldn't read. No. He had told me *I was a poet*. What a gift, a gift I would never forget. He turned my life around, for he saw in me something no one had ever seen before. He saw potential. He empowered me. It took years of reading, yes reading, and a lot of it, before I was able to write as good a poem as I did that first day. And it took even longer, until after I had graduated from university, to figure out how I was able to write that *first* poem.

I was able to write it because I had loved to sing, but also because my school choir teacher had encouraged me. Without her, I would never have been able to write that first poem. Without her, I may never have learned the basics of reading, and ultimately the fascination of reading. Without her, I probably would never have become a writer. So, my choir teacher was a gift-giver too, the first gift-giver, which brings me back to storytelling.

There are many children today who are very much like I was when I was young. Reading for them is either a chore, something foreign, something frightening, or all three. They are second language students, some of them refugees; children of First Nations; children from broken homes; or children whose parents simply don't have the time or the inclination to read, let alone read to their children. These are the children that need and deserve a gift, the gift of story, or the gift of song, that excites them to the wonders of language and the wonders of the written word. That gift was given to me, and I feel it my duty and joy to pass it on to as many children as possible. And I say to teachers and librarians alike, that if you pass on the gift of reading, even if only to a few children, through storytelling, you will have empowered those children and made a mark in their lives they will never forget.

Robert Stelmach, a.k.a. Max Tell, is a writer, storyteller, and educator. His latest CD, *Dragon with a Flagon* is, “a fun choice for family listening, and a solid addition to public library collections.” – School Library Journal, January 2005. Last summer, Max toured twenty-nine libraries in the Okanagan. To view video clips of the tour go to his website: <http://www.maxtell.ca>.





YAACING

**THE NEWSLETTER OF THE YOUNG ADULT AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES SECTION
OF BCLA**