

ILLINOIS LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

# REPORTER

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# *The Illinois Library Association Reporter*

is a forum for those who are improving and reinventing Illinois libraries, with articles that seek to: explore new ideas and practices from all types of libraries and library systems; examine the challenges facing the profession; and inform the library community and its supporters with news and comment about important issues. The *ILA Reporter* is produced and circulated with the purpose of enhancing and supporting the value of libraries, which provide free and equal access to information. This access is essential for an open democratic society, an informed electorate, and the advancement of knowledge for all people.



## ON THE COVER

This month's issue includes features on war literature and expanding your readers' advisory to include all forms of media, which made us think about war stories on film and screen, as well as on the page. Writing about war is nothing new, but there is an explosion of new literature by recent veterans to enrich your collections. Author Elizabeth Gross also notes the role of war experiences in helping to define many fictional characters, broadening the topic even further.

The Illinois Library Association is the voice for Illinois libraries and the millions who depend on them. It provides leadership for the development, promotion, and improvement of library services in Illinois and for the library community in order to enhance learning and ensure access to information for all. It is the eighth oldest library association in the world and the third largest state association in the United States, with members in academic, public, school, government, and special libraries. Its 3,200 members are primarily librarians and library staff, but also trustees, publishers, and other supporters.

The Illinois Library Association has four full-time staff members. It is governed by a sixteen-member executive board, made up of elected officers. The association employs the services of Strategic Advocacy Group for legislative advocacy. ILA is a 501(c) (3) charitable and educational organization.

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# Reading, Writing, and Reflecting on War

**T**he literature of war dates from *The Iliad* or stories told in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* to last year's National Book Award winner Phil Klay for his short-story collection, *Redeployment*. War—and the people and nations who wage it—have long captivated both writers and readers. Poetry and prose alike have garnered a following, along with memoir, documentary films, and now even literary blogs, such as *Time Now: The Iraq and Afghanistan Wars in Art, Film, and Literature* (acolytesofwar.com).

Veterans are not the only readers, and wartime experiences may be only a part of a character's story. War and its effect on the psyche of the soldiers provides background for such writers as James Lee Burke, whose characters Dave Robicheaux and Clere Purcell share a common experience in Vietnam. Although the novels are not about the war, they allow the reader to understand how the experience of war has reshaped the worldview of the characters. Another of Burke's characters, Hackberry Holland, has constant flashbacks to the Korean War, triggered by current experiences.

There's been a shift in war literature from glorifying the combatants and highlighting soldiers' unquestioning obedience to reflection of the views of society on war and battles in general. The literature is complex and offers multiple points of view—the view of the combatants, the view of bystanders and civilians, and differing views of the men and women who serve in war.

## CHANGING PERSPECTIVES

The view of war changes constantly in society. As we look back at the American Revolutionary War for instance, our literature celebrates the glory of the new republic as it emerges from the confinement of colonial constraints, and we as readers tend to see it as a just and honorable war. However, a review of literature from other countries colors the way this war is seen according to local politics and culture. Time as well as geography influences the way individual wars are viewed. A communist Chinese author of the 1970s will see this war much differently than a Canadian or British writer of that same time period, based on the ideology of each country at the time. Contemporary writings tend to play up the humanity of the leaders, even to the point that we see how flawed they are.

In the history of the United States, the Civil War is seen as a brother vs. brother war. The South was pitted against the North in a battle that seems just and right to both sides. There is also the glory for the North of the end of slavery. In Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain*, however, the war devastated not only the individual, Inman, but the countryside and people as well. (As an aside, the novel is seen as modeled on *The Odyssey*. And why not? It's a great story!)

War literature is ultimately the story of what it means to be human, and war poetry in particular often demonstrates the sorrow as well as the belief in war as being the right thing to do. War literature is sometimes used to create a situation in which an author can share his or her sensibilities, and persuade readers to understand and perhaps agree with them. Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*, which many read with the idea that it is a Civil War era novel, was written long after the war, and Crane was never a combatant.

[continued on page 6]



## FROM GLORY TO “GRUNT”

In the literature of World War I, the notion that war is incredibly hard on both combatants and the populace takes a much stronger place in war literature. Erich Maria Remarque’s *All Quiet on the Western Front* was published in 1929, eleven years after the war ended. In this novel, the message was that the extreme stress of combat and the physical hardships endured by soldiers made it difficult for them to return to normal, nonmilitary life. Much of the literature of this time emphasizes the unbelievable horror of war. At the time this novel was released, Germany was going through the incredible upheaval that led to the rise of Adolf Hitler. World War I literature tends to show how war dehumanizes both soldier and civilian alike.

The literature of World War II, in America at least, is based quite extensively on the experiences of those who lived through the war. Norman Mailer’s *The Naked and the Dead* is based upon his experiences in the Philippines during the war, and James Jones’s *The Thin Red Line* and *From Here to Eternity*, as well as Herman Wouk’s *The Caine Mutiny: A Novel of World War II*, look frankly at the people who, just a few short months before, were civilians without the cares of war and who would be forever changed by the experience.

The literature of Vietnam tends to be more explicit than previous eras, in keeping with the overall literary landscape of the last half of the twentieth century. Writers like Tim O’Brien and Walter Dean Myers infuse reality into their narrative to allow the reader to experience the war zone from the perspective of the soldier. Terms like “grunt,” describing an infantryman, move into the language, and protest as well as celebration become themes.

## AFTER 9/11

There has been an explosion of literature in all forms—memoir, poetry, novels, short stories, film—from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, much of it written by recent veterans. Stacey Peebles’ *Welcome to the Suck: Narrating the American Soldier’s Experience in Iraq* reviews the first wave of this writing in an engaging and provocative text.

Another type of narrative that has begun to show itself is the female voice. Where earlier female narratives of the war experience might feature a nurse or wife, Gayle Tzemach Lemmon’s *Ashley’s War* tells the story of highly trained women soldiers and the contributions and sacrifices they made on the front lines of the war in Afghanistan. This type of narrative represents a different perspective in that so much of war literature records, glorifies, and expounds on male efforts on the battlefield. Treatments of gender, status, and authority are all emerging in this new post-9/11 literature.

War literature is varied and broad in its depth of coverage. It includes not only prose, but also nonfiction and poetry. It has changed its focus, goals, and rationale over the centuries. While once the domain of predominantly male authors and subjects, the literature of war has expanded to include the entire range of those who serve. We read war literature to feel the vicarious thrill of the battle, to imagine the feeling of belonging that so many who have fought together have come to know, and to read for ourselves about the depth of human courage and fortitude in the face of the unthinkable. Writers share war literature to communicate to others their profound sense of survival and the knowledge—having seen the highest of human sacrifices—that life is sacred. The stories they share are profound and worth exploring for all of us. ■

“We read war literature to feel the vicarious thrill of the battle, to imagine the feeling of belonging that so many who have fought together have come to know.”



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## Selected War Lit Reading Lists

"A Golden Age of War Writing: A Critical Companion to Contemporary War Lit," May 27, 2105.

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"A Reading List of Modern War Stories," *New York Times*, December 25, 2014.

[http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/26/books/a-reading-list-of-modern-war-stories.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/26/books/a-reading-list-of-modern-war-stories.html?_r=0)

"Best Iraq and Afghanistan War Books," Goodreads.

[www.goodreads.com/list/show/16945.Best\\_Iraq\\_and\\_Afghanistan\\_War\\_Books](http://www.goodreads.com/list/show/16945.Best_Iraq_and_Afghanistan_War_Books)

ILA's Joining Forces initiative has reading lists for adults, children, and families. The adult list has sections on World Wars I and II, Vietnam, and Iraq and Afghanistan; the children's list is organized by age group.

[www.ila.org/initiatives/joining-forces/adult-program-ideas](http://www.ila.org/initiatives/joining-forces/adult-program-ideas)

[www.ila.org/initiatives/joining-forces/military-families-children-toolkit](http://www.ila.org/initiatives/joining-forces/military-families-children-toolkit)

*Time Now: Iraq and Afghanistan Wars in Art, Film, and Literature*.

Blog edited by Peter Molin, former US Army infantry officer who now teaches at Rutgers University.

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# From Serials to *Serial*: Integrated Readers' Advisory

**R**eaders' advisory, or RA, has been a library service since the late nineteenth century. Early versions focused on meeting the needs of adults for continuing education rather than entertainment, but starting in the 1980s, the focus shifted to leisure reading—which, for most readers, means fiction. Nonfiction RA is becoming more prevalent, but why stop with books? Our collections are rich with media in a variety of formats and genres. Whole-collection advisory, also known as integrated advisory, takes all of this variety into account, helping patrons make connections between library collections, regardless of format.

In her book *Integrated Advisory Service*, RA expert Dr. Jessica Moyer defines integrated advisory as “a way of providing advisory services to library users that includes all different formats and media while staying focused around a genre.” Moyer is careful to state that introducing integrated advisory in our libraries does not detract from our important role as readers' advisors; rather, it's a function of serving our patrons by connecting them with the materials that best meet their needs. Moyer's argument is that we should be able to assist a patron interested in finding a good film or podcast with the same expertise with which we assist a reader interested in finding their next great read.

Whole-collection advisory can seem intimidating and overwhelming at first. Keeping up with our print collections is difficult enough—this just adds to the burden! But consider libraries' print collections. Have we read all of the books in our collections? Of course not—but we are familiar enough with the basics to make appropriate suggestions when our patrons are looking for something new to read. We don't need to watch or listen to everything—we simply need enough familiarity with what's out there to be able to make those all-important connections between materials.

## APPEAL ACROSS FORMATS

In readers' advisory training, we learn about appeal factors, such as plot, pacing, and character. Determining why the patron enjoyed a book is crucial to suggesting the right match. Consider a popular best seller like Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl*. There are a number of reasons that a reader could enjoy this book—the fast-paced twists and turns, the unreliable narrator, or the suspenseful whodunit. Once the appeal factors for that particular reader have been identified, appropriate suggestions can be made.

The same is true for whole-collection advisory, with the added layer of format. Asking the patron what types of items are of interest opens up a number of additional questions. Perhaps she recently listened to an audiobook of *Gone Girl* and she really liked the narrator. Perhaps he saw the movie and is looking for similar thrillers. Perhaps the patron is open to pretty much anything, regardless of format, as long as there's an element of surprise.

Most library staff members who assist with readers' advisory are familiar with review journals such as *Booklist*, *Publishers Weekly*, and *Library Journal*. As much as some of us would like to, we can't read everything. Reviews, combined with techniques such as Jessica Moyer's “How to Read a Book in 10 Minutes” ([www.alaeditions.org/blog/62/how-read-book-10-minutes](http://www.alaeditions.org/blog/62/how-read-book-10-minutes)) help readers' advisors gain an understanding of the appeal factors of a variety of titles without having to read the actual book.

Professional reading for whole-collection advisory is much broader and could include traditional print magazines, such as *Entertainment Weekly* and *People*, as well as online sites, such as A.V. Club ([www.avclub.com/](http://www.avclub.com/)), the Hollywood Prospectus section of Grantland ([grantland.com/hollywood-prospectus/](http://grantland.com/hollywood-prospectus/)), or Salon's Entertainment category

[continued on page 10]



THERE ARE TWO SIDES  
TO EVERY STORY ...

# GONE GIRL

GILLIAN  
FLYNN

THRILLER  
OF THE  
YEAR  
Oscar

([www.salon.com/category/entertainment/](http://www.salon.com/category/entertainment/)), which provide a broad overview of what's hot, trendy, and acclaimed in a range of media. Reviews give us ample information about plot, tone, and character—the basics of appeal. But just as readers' advisors should read widely, whole collection advisors should read, listen, and watch widely—even if it's just a movie trailer, a single episode of a television show or podcast, or a song or two from an album.

## EXPANDING THE INTERVIEW

When a patron comes to you and asks for a suggestion for something good to read, how do you respond? Chances are, you ask them what they've read and enjoyed lately, then follow up by asking what they liked about that book. What happens if the patron says that they haven't read anything lately, but would like to do some leisure reading? You'd probably ask them about movies or television shows that they like in an attempt to get at the types of stories they enjoy, then you'd take that information and use it to match the patron with a suitable book. A whole-collection advisory interview operates the same way—it involves gathering information about what the patron enjoys, why they enjoyed it, and what types of suggestions they're looking for. Asking questions that get at these key points is crucial to making the right connection.

If a patron says they really enjoyed the podcast *Serial* and would like to find books, movies, and TV shows that are similar, what's the best approach? Start by asking what they enjoyed about *Serial*. Was it the true crime aspect? Was it the careful analysis of the events of the crime? Was it the episodic nature of the show, where the story became clearer over time? Was it the unreliability of the people involved? Then make a few suggestions: "Have you watched the TV show *Broadchurch*? It features a similar type of story—a criminal investigation where peoples' stories keep shifting, with a detective trying to get to the bottom of the case. Or are you looking for something that's a true story instead?" The interaction follows a basic pattern of ask – listen – suggest – clarify.

Your first suggestion may not be the right one, so be prepared to make multiple suggestions. Unlike a factual reference question, whole-collection advisory questions typically have multiple answers, and readers, viewers, and listeners don't always respond to the same appeal factors. The blockbuster *Fifty Shades of Grey* is a classic example—some readers are drawn to the billionaire alpha male hero, some like the power dynamic between the lead couple, some like the steamy love scenes, and some are just reading it because it's a best seller and they want to be part of the cultural conversation. A patron who likes billionaire alpha males is going to have different interests than a patron who just wants to read whatever's hot right now. You'd make different suggestions for each, and it may take more than one try to get to the heart of the patrons' needs.

## MAKING THE MATCH

There are numerous ways to promote whole-collection advisory services to the public. Being in the stacks where our patrons are is a powerful technique. Approaching patrons by asking open-ended questions, such as "What can I help you find today?" can serve as an effective conversation starter. Form-based readers' advisory, where patrons enter information about the types of materials that interest them on a web-based form and receive a response with a variety of suggestions, can easily be modified to include library materials beyond books. The Champaign Public Library, where I work, has three separate services—BookMatch, MovieMatch, and MusicMatch—intended to connect library patrons with the materials that best meet their needs. Library displays and readalike lists, both physical and virtual, can include materials beyond books as a means of promoting the collections.

In a changing information landscape, the personal connections library staff provide are a way to maintain our relevance and promote our services. Whole-collection advisory helps us meet our patrons where they are, promotes all aspects of our collections, and connects patrons with the materials that best suit their leisure entertainment needs. **ILA**

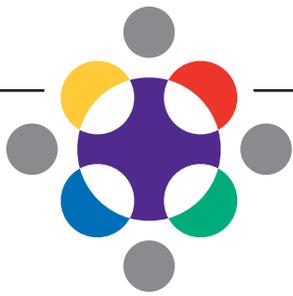
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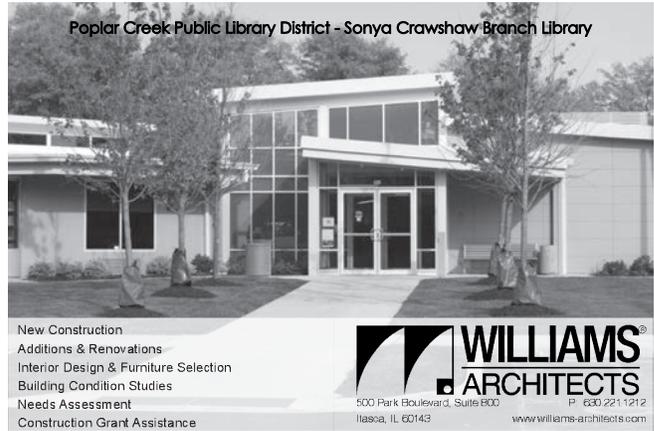


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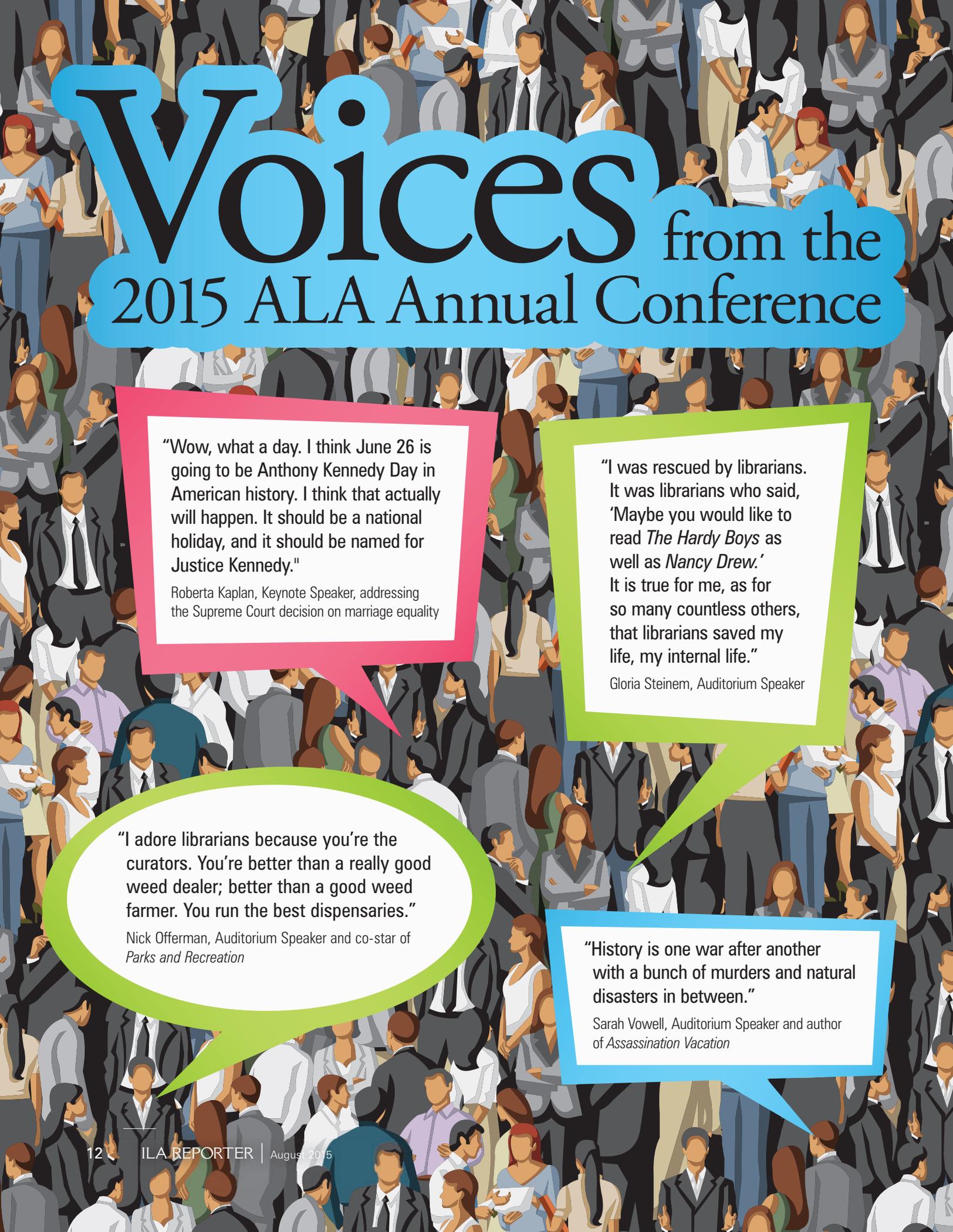
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# Voices from the 2015 ALA Annual Conference

"Wow, what a day. I think June 26 is going to be Anthony Kennedy Day in American history. I think that actually will happen. It should be a national holiday, and it should be named for Justice Kennedy."

Roberta Kaplan, Keynote Speaker, addressing the Supreme Court decision on marriage equality

"I was rescued by librarians. It was librarians who said, 'Maybe you would like to read *The Hardy Boys* as well as *Nancy Drew*.' It is true for me, as for so many countless others, that librarians saved my life, my internal life."

Gloria Steinem, Auditorium Speaker

"I adore librarians because you're the curators. You're better than a really good weed dealer; better than a good weed farmer. You run the best dispensaries."

Nick Offerman, Auditorium Speaker and co-star of *Parks and Recreation*

"History is one war after another with a bunch of murders and natural disasters in between."

Sarah Vowell, Auditorium Speaker and author of *Assassination Vacation*



"Here's what I mean by the miracle of language. When you're falling into a good book, exactly as you might fall into a dream, a little conduit opens, a passageway between a reader's heart and a writer's, a connection that transcends the barriers of continents and generations and even death... And here's the magic. You're different. You can never go back to being exactly the same person you were before you disappeared into that book."

Anthony Doerr, 2015 winner of the Carnegie Medal for Fiction for *All the Light We Cannot See*

"With a bolt of lightning on my kicks... the court is SIZZLING. My sweat is DRIZZLING. Stop all that quivering. Cuz tonight I'm delivering."

Josh, one of two basketball-playing brothers in Kwame Alexander's Newbery Medal-winning novel-in-verse, *The Crossover*

"Illiteracy is certainly a failure of democracy."

Edwidge Danticat, Auditorium Speaker and author

"This speech that I am giving will be transcribed into zeros and ones and released into a sea of information so that you can always hear my voice. Let this be my love letter to you even long after I am gone."

Dan Santat, 2015 (Randolph) Caldecott Medal for *The Adventures of Beekle: The Unimaginary Friend*

**"We need to change the definition of libraries and librarians in our dictionaries."**



## ◀ MY TURN ▶

| Nanette Donohue, Champaign Public Library |

# Beyond Circulation

**T**he news from libraries sounds dire—circulation statistics are down across the board. Libraries must be losing their relevance if people aren't checking out our materials! But if you talk to people who work in libraries, they'll tell you that libraries are as busy as ever. Why the disconnect?

There are a number of factors at play. One is that media circulation, especially DVD circulation, has buoyed public libraries' circulation statistics for more than a decade. Our patrons have a bounty of entertainment choices that they didn't have just a few years ago. From subscription-based services like Netflix to free videos available on YouTube to ad-supported music on Spotify to free, downloadable podcasts, instant-gratification entertainment is everywhere. Want to watch something funny? A few clicks, and you're there, with no need to wait for the item you want (or deal with a scratched or otherwise unplayable DVD).

Another factor is that physical items are becoming less important to our patrons. It's difficult for me to remember the last time I purchased a physical DVD. I used to buy them frequently, but a combination of factors—less leisure time, increasing access to streaming or downloadable content, and a desire to accumulate less physical stuff—has caused my DVD purchasing to plummet. Likewise, I'm checking fewer DVDs out from the library, and it seems that other patrons are doing the same. Many of us don't feel the need to own—or borrow—an item as long as we can access it in some way.

Which is why libraries are getting into the streaming content business. There are several subscription- or fee-based products that libraries can offer their patrons, but they often lack the new and exciting content that our patrons want. Some libraries are circulating Roku boxes with Netflix, Amazon Instant Video, and Hulu subscriptions preloaded, allowing patrons to connect the device to their home WiFi to access popular content. These are good solutions, but they aren't going to give libraries the circulation numbers that DVDs once did.

Relying on circulation statistics to tell the story of the library's impact on the community has always been an easy way out. We don't have to delve too deeply into why people use the library or how people use the library—we have this simple measure of “things going out the door.” But when the model changes, and patrons' choices expand, this simple measure makes us look like we're failing, and we're not.

Those of us who are telling our libraries' stories to our communities need to rely less on circulation statistics and more on the impact that our libraries have on our users' lives and on the well-being of our communities. We do make a difference, and that difference is beyond the number of items checked out. Depending solely on circulation statistics as a measure of a library's success is a narrow and dangerous view. Our role is changing, and we must change as well. To do otherwise is to neglect the important roles that we play for our patrons—roles that go far beyond the materials that we loan. **ILA**



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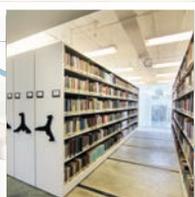
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