

Check It Out!

THIRTEEN

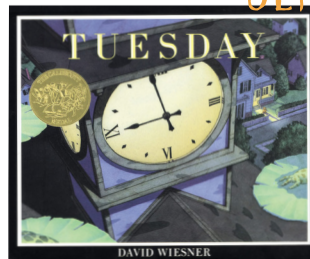
FOR

THREE

(& UP)

by Ellen W Chu

CAN THE COUNTY
WITH THE STATE'S LARGEST SHARE OF
SENIORS LOVE KIDS' BOOKS?



**The
Book
With
No
Pictures**

B.J. Novak

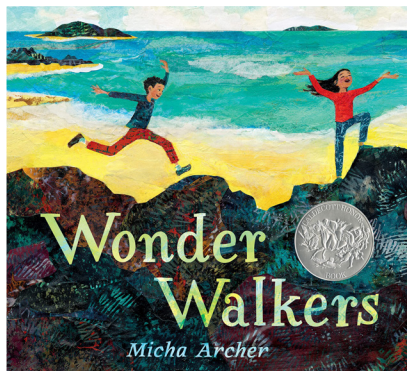
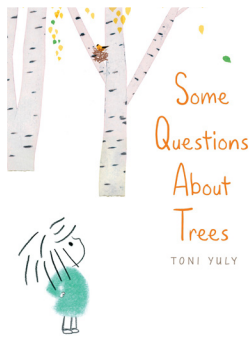


Like, I suspect, many readers of this newsletter, I have a grandchild, who is about to turn three. And perhaps like some of you, one of my favorite things about being a grandparent is finding and reading books for my granddaughter. What a perfect excuse to revisit beloved picture books from past decades, even while exploring new ones. So in part to rekindle a love you may have forgotten—and to help you find a memorable gift for the young person in your life—we devote this issue of “Check It Out!” to children’s books and their creators. One thing became obvious as the issue came together: with so much to learn and teach through so-called children’s books, why wouldn’t adults love them too?



Children’s picture books should be fun. Some books are fun even without words. Take ***Tuesday*** by David Wiesner (1991), winner of the 1992 Caldecott Medal. Early one morning, a flotilla of frogs begins to rise from a silent swamp. The plot unfolds in pictures, with words as punctuation. Fanciful flights pass across the pages, and by the final punctuation mark (“Next Tuesday, 7:58 p.m.”), a shadow on the side of a red barn and a curly pink tail overhead in the sunset sky reveal that more than frogs can fly. Other books are fun without any pictures. B. J. Novak’s ***The Book with No Pictures*** (2014) has 45—45!?!—pages whose type itself makes you laugh. But the words are the most fun. Woe and laughter will chase every adult whose

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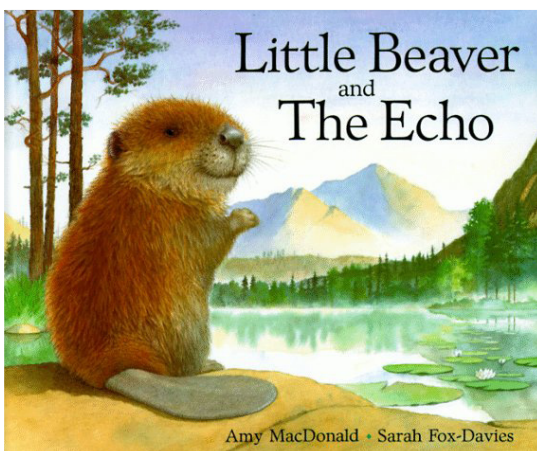
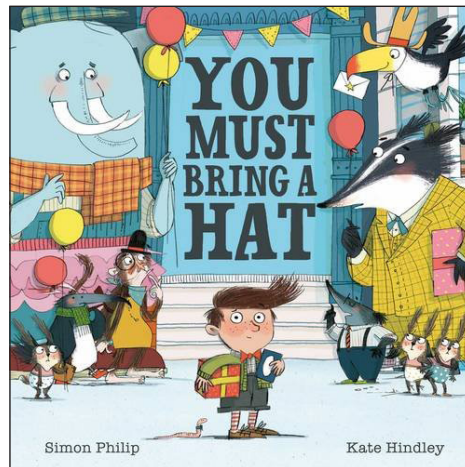


small person demands this book be read aloud, over and over. Of course, lots of fun books have both words and pictures. The 2017 Caldecott Honor book *Du Iz Tak?* by Northwest illustrator Carson Ellis (2016) depicts a delightful bug's-eye view of summer growth, play, and seasonal transformation while offering the verbal among us a playful exercise in learning a new (fake) language. And Simon Philip and Kate Hindley's *You Must Bring a Hat* chronicles the absurd contortions (and characters) needed to attend one particular birthday party on Panama Avenue, West Trilby.

Books that open a child's eyes to nature have always been favorites. Some feature children asking questions, such as Bremerton author Toni Yuly's charming *Some Questions about Trees* (2022; see profile on page 5). "Is fall when trees throw parties with leaves?" "When I plant a tree, are we family?" *Wonder Walkers* by Micha Archer (2021; 2022 Caldecott Honor winner) asks more-abstract questions, with intricately patterned

illustrations: "Are forests the mountain's fur? . . . Is the wind the world breathing? . . . I wonder. Me too." Other books center winsome stories on animal (or plant) protagonists that satisfy even the (mostly) fact-loving biologists among us. Corey R. Tabor's *Mel Fell* (2021), another 2022 Caldecott Honor winner, tells the story of a cheerfully determined little bird, a kingfisher, who launches herself from her high treetop nest despite her nestmates' misgivings. Creatures sluggish and speedy try to save her on the way down . . . but, turns out, it's a good thing they can't! And lest we forget the much-maligned bats in our world, *Stellaluna* by Janell Cannon (1993) charms us with a baby bat who escapes an owl attack, falls into a nest where she is raised by a mother bird, and learns to live like a bird until she is finally reunited with her real mother and other fruit bats.

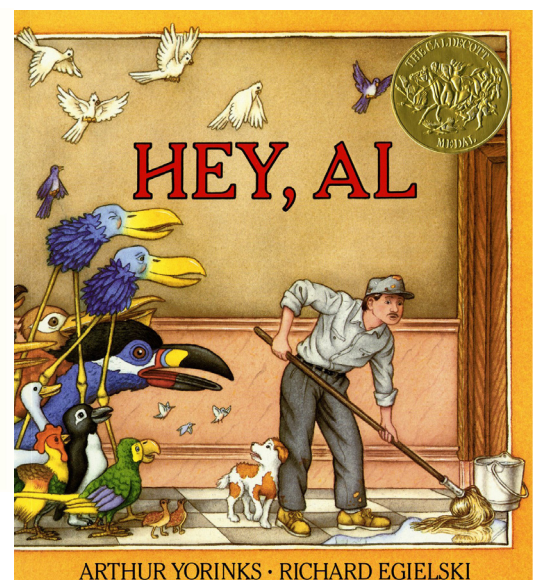
By means realistic and imaginary, many books open insights about friendship and home, often slipping in other teachable moments. A lonely



THE RABBIT LISTENED

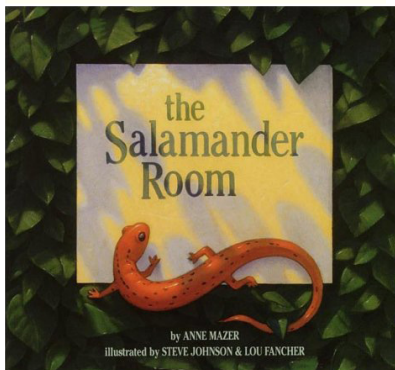
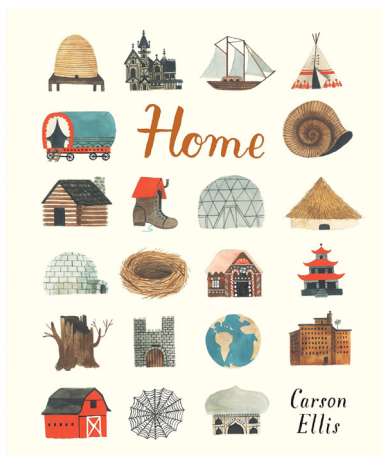
NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

CORI DOERRFELD



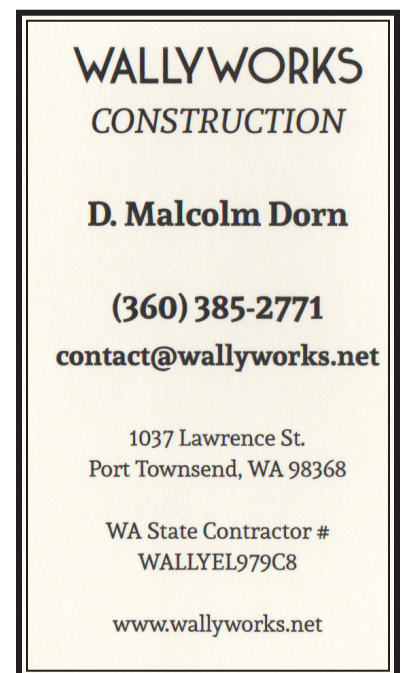
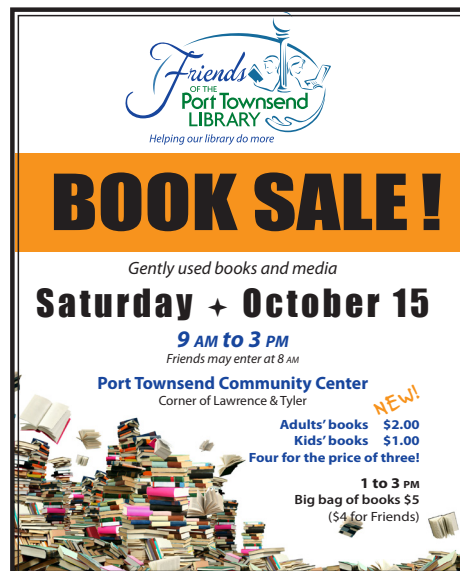
young beaver finds that he does have friends after all in ***Little Beaver and the Echo***, by Amy MacDonald and Sarah Fox-Davies (1990). With help from a wise old beaver, Little Beaver and his new friends discover another constant friend, the Echo, which “is always across the pond from you. . . . When you are sad, the Echo is sad. . . . When you are happy, the Echo is happy too.” Cori Doerrfeld has written a tender tale about the healing power of a steady friend in ***The Rabbit Listened*** (2018). When out of nowhere a flock of birds destroys Taylor’s amazing creation, all the animals come with their ideas to fix the damage. But Taylor doesn’t feel like taking their noisy advice. The rabbit sits silently beside Taylor, who acts on all the animals’ advice in turn—and then builds an even more amazing creation.

Stunningly illustrated 1987 Caldecott Medal winner ***Hey, Al***, by Arthur Yorinks and Richard Egielski (1986), blends the mundane with the fantastical to bring us a



simple fable of friendship and home with Al and his faithful dog Eddie: “Paradise lost is sometimes Heaven found”—for these two friends, in just one room on New York’s West Side. But home, as Carson Ellis shows us in ***Home*** (2015), her debut solo picture book, can also be a boat, a shoe, underground or underwater, on the road, clean or messy, tall or short, here or there. Where is your home, and where are you? And what about a little orange salamander living in the woods? Can it be happy if a child brings it home? Yes, as long as it lives in ***The Salamander Room*** (Anne Mazer and Steve Johnson, 1991)—a perfect place Brian creates for the salamander he brings home and where, next to him, “with its head resting on” “moss that looks like little stars,” “the salamander will sleep.”

Now, what *did* you do with all your kids’ books? 📖



PROFILE

OF ANIMALS, BOOKS, AND EMPATHY

by Diane Urbani de la Paz

THE CHICKENS and the new creative project: These have writer and longtime Port Townsend Patrick Jennings, in his words, “absolutely enthralled.”

He’s a man from many backgrounds.

Originally a midwesterner, Jennings has lived in Arizona and worked as a librarian and a preschool teacher. For twenty-five books now, he’s been an award-winning children’s author, dreaming up books about dogs, birds, and a cat named Hissy Fitz.

These days Jennings, 60, and his family are raising chickens, as in laying hens. This began when his stepson wanted to sell eggs. To start, the teenager acquired three chicks, of three breeds, and raised them in his room. Now the family has a larger flock—not in anyone’s room—thanks to the addition of a friend’s hens. Things are going well, Jennings said. “I had no idea they were going to be warm and friendly,” he added of the birds.

As a writer and as a human, Jennings is all about thinking outside himself. In July during the “Beyond the Beaten Path” Summer Reading Program at the Port Townsend Public Library, he gave a talk on how to use empathy to make a story’s characters come to vibrant life.

A lecture on empathy can be a bit dry for youngsters, he acknowledges. What’s more fun: pretending to be an animal. Jennings has been known to blindfold himself and walk around his house on all fours, seeking things out by scent or sound.

The author also spoke about empathy in the face of fear. There was a time, Jennings admits, when he was afraid of snakes. To conquer this fear, he learned as much as he could about the creatures, which made it easier for him to empathize

with them. Jennings published a book from that particular point of view, *We Can’t All Be Rattlesnakes*, in 2009. This story belongs to Crusher, a gopher snake who is captured by a boy—and who turns the tables on him and plans her escape.

Jennings likewise encourages younger writers to imagine—and research—lives that are different from their own. Since moving to Port Townsend two decades ago, Jennings has served as a coach for kids interested in writing. His Pato’s Cave group, made up of preteen participants, met for many years until the pandemic arrived. This past summer, some of those kids, now older teenagers, reunited for an evolved group.

“It’s like an adult writing workshop: Everybody submits work ahead of time and then we get together and critique,” said Jennings.

Zinnia Hansen, the 2021–22 youth poet laureate for the city of Seattle, is an alumna of his Port Townsend group for young writers. Now a dean’s-list student at the University of Washington, Hansen has published a book of her poetry and taken it on a national tour. Titled *Spikenard*, the book is named for an essential oil derived from a flower in the honeysuckle family.

“She is so amazing,” Jennings said. “I saw it. . . . I encouraged her to do other writing groups, and she joined the online Hugo House,” Seattle’s nonprofit writing center.

Jennings is himself deep into a new writing endeavor. “It’s for adults, which I have not done,” he said. No other details were forthcoming, though Jennings did allude to the inspiration he finds working at the Starlight Room, the Rose Theatre’s upstairs venue in Port Townsend.

The project “is really fascinating,” said Jennings, smiling his youthful smile. 📖



LOCAL AUTHOR PATRICK JENNINGS
LOOKS OUTSIDE THE BOX

THE QUESTION: What's bringing you happiness these days?
The answer, from artist-author-grower Toni Yuly, comes fast.

"I have squash, zucchini, tomatoes, potatoes . . . I have pumpkins growing," she said, just getting started in the list of goods from her garden. She also has "a variety of other little struggling vegetables" in the Bremerton yard she calls wild and crazy.

It's the setting for her creative work. Yuly, who visited the Port Townsend Public Library this spring during Community Read, thrives on getting together with kids. She's written and illustrated nine books, starting seven years ago with *Early Bird*, then *Night Owl* and *Cat Nap*. Last year she released *Ollie Feels Fine*, starring an octopus, and this year, *Some Questions about Trees*, the book she presented this past March in an online storytime for Port Townsend families. All these titles are part of the Port Townsend Public Library's collection.

"There's no minimum age," Yuly said of her books. She draws, paints, and writes about the natural world, in what her editor has called observational science.

Yuly, 68, was a teenager spending a year in Sendai, Japan, when she was first enchanted by Eastern art. The work she saw there changed her life. Yuly later had the good fortune of studying with Jacob Lawrence while she earned her fine arts degree in painting at the University of Washington. In an interview found on her website, toniyuly.com, the artist reflects on how Lawrence taught her she didn't need a big, well-furnished studio. She could create wherever she happened to find herself.

Inspiration—and moral support—flowed from her day job, too. Yuly worked for the King County Library System starting in 1981; she left there a decade ago to pursue her art full time. Children's librarians were and are among her strongest allies, she said.

Today, Yuly, a native of Seattle, feels grateful for her adopted city of Bremerton, including downtown's Ballast Book Co., her home bookstore. She also makes frequent trips to Port Townsend. "I love the physical setting . . . the beaches, the stores, the [food] co-op. It's an art-welcoming town. You really feel that," she said.

The Port Townsend Public Library—and its director Melody

INSPIRATION IN ABUNDANCE

CHILDREN'S AUTHOR FINDS IT OUTDOORS AND IN

by Diane Urbani de la Paz

Sky Weaver—"have always welcomed me with open arms and made me feel like I was just the best children's author in the world," she added.

"I have adored Toni Yuly's art and writing for years. She is a master of elegant simplicity in her words and illustrations," said Weaver. "Her generosity of spirit in wanting to share stories with our community has been so lovely. I have given her books as gifts to babies, and I often hear parents tell me her books fall apart and have to be put back together many times," she observed. "That is how much they are read and loved."

Yuly's just-finished book, *Slowly Slowly*, is set for a 2023 release from Simon & Schuster. Now she's working on *The Pelican Can*, about that pouch-billed seabird. It seems like everybody she talks to loves pelicans. They will have to wait, however, for Little, Brown and Company's publication of the book in summer 2024.

Right now, the artist and author looks forward to in-person storytimes, which are something she has dearly missed. Port Townsend and its library beckon, Yuly said. "I miss the kids," she added. "I'm looking forward to interacting more." 📖

Diane Urbani de la Paz is the author of *All My Love: A Story of Love and Hope*, released in spring 2022. She lives and writes in Port Townsend.



THE FRIEND, THE WITCH, AND THE PROCLAMATION

Celebrate the freedom to read

by Cindy Johnson

Serving on the board of the Friends of the Port Townsend Library has opened my eyes and mind in some unexpected ways. When a fellow board member, this newsletter's editor and producer and good friend (yes, that's all one person), mentioned planning to devote this issue to children's books, I thought I had absolutely nothing to contribute.

Then, quite by chance, I stumbled upon a reference

to a banned picture book about a character named Strega Nona. So began a whole new learning experience—an unexpected exploration of banned books and Banned Books Week, when the entire community of libraries, publishers, booksellers, teachers, and book lovers sets aside a week in September to remind us that we cannot take our freedom to read for granted.

First published in 1975 and winning a Caldecott

Honor in 1976, *Strega Nona* was written and illustrated by noted children's author Tomie dePaola. A 2012 *School Library Journal* poll rated it as one of the top 100 children's picture books of all time. The word *strega* is Italian for witch; Nona, the witch's name, comes from the Italian *nonna*, or grandma; and Strega Nona is the wise main character in a series of picture books—stories about friendship, love, and helping others.

One book, *Strega Nona: Her Story* (1996), describes Nona's childhood and her relationship with her own grandmother, also a *strega*, and is a sweet portrayal of grandmothers and grandchildren. In another, *Strega Nona's Harvest* (2009), Nona and her helper celebrate bountiful harvests from their gardens by giving a feast for their village. The first *Strega Nona* joins other notable books banned for their positive portrayal of magic

and witchcraft, including *The Lord of the Rings*; the Anglican theologian C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*; books by Roald Dahl; and the Harry Potter series.

A search of banned kids' books reveals a long list and many topics. One that piqued my interest is the "notable" and award-winning *And Tango Makes Three* by Peter Parnell, Justin Richardson, and Henry Cole (2005), a true story about two male penguins in New York's Central Park Zoo, who hatch an extra egg and make a family with their baby penguin. The book was banned because it depicts a nontraditional family. Other notables include E. B. White's *Charlotte's Web* (1952; talking animals are disrespectful to God) and Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963, 1964 Caldecott Medal; supernatural and too dark).

Stories or books centered on people of color or LGBTQ+ themes are often banned. Profanity, sexual content, and topics some view as offensive also elicit debate and challenges. Books considered classics—suggested reading in my high school English classes—have been banned: Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (profanity, adult themes, racism); George Orwell's *1984* (pro-Communist, sexuality), John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* (profanity).

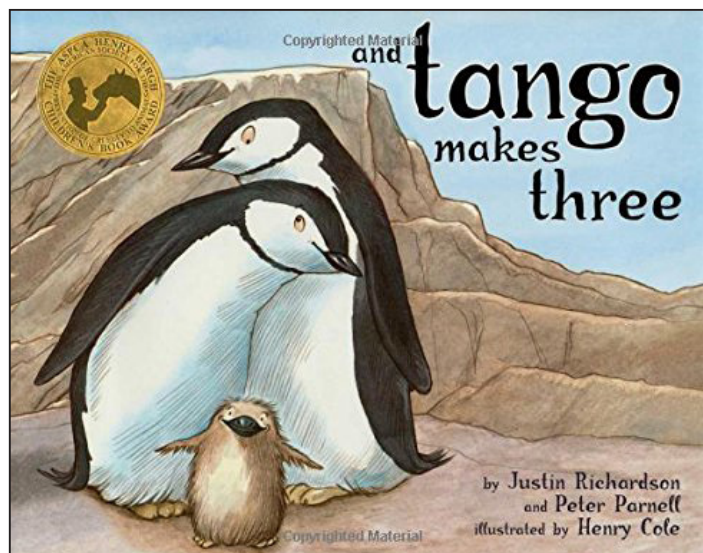
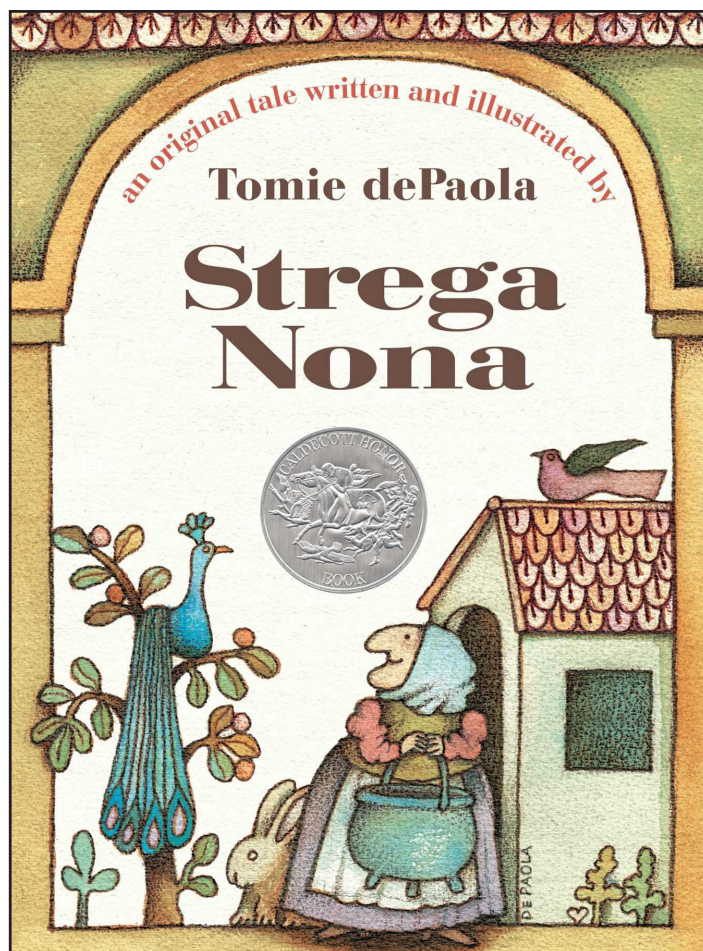
My exploration of banned books continued with the discovery that the American Library Association (ALA) celebrates Banned Books Week during the last full week of every September. On September 19, Port

Townsend's mayor David Faber proclaimed September 18–24, 2022, as Banned Books Week here. Our library devoted a display to banned books. Around the country, Banned Books Week emphasizes support for our "freedom to seek and to express ideas," even unpopular ones. This year the *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, and even *Elle* magazine published articles on banned books and their authors, focusing on the authors' personal stories and the recent rise in book banning.

Statistics on the ALA's website tell the story: the number of banned books is now the highest it's been in twenty years of tracking this information. PEN America, an advocacy group whose mission is to celebrate and protect creative expression, reports that in the one-year period ending June 30, 2022, 89 percent of all banned books were intended for younger readers, from picture books to young adult titles.

Some parents' groups say they are motivated to protect children from topics they consider disturbing. In my view, however, parents should have the right to choose books for their own children—but only their own children. I do not believe parents' choices should restrict access for everyone in their schools or community. In the end, those who attempt to ban books, for whatever reasons, impose their belief system on others who may disagree.

Banned Books Week is about celebrating our right to exercise our own judgment when it comes



to reading. The freedom to access books comes under the First Amendment, which protects free speech and a free press. As the city of Port Townsend's proclamation states, "intellectual freedom is essential to the preservation of a free society and creative culture." I am glad to be

part of a community that recognizes the importance of respecting the right to read and to access information.

And I hope Tango's and Strega Nona's stories live on, free from censorship. That will be a true celebration—one our library continues to preserve and promote. 📖

IMAGINATION LIBRARY INVESTS IN EARLY LITERACY

by Lynn Nowak

THE FIRST YEAR of Jefferson County's commitment to Dolly Parton's Imagination Library could be called an unqualified success.

Since spring 2021, almost half of local children under age 5 are already benefiting from Parton's brainchild, a program that provides one book a month—for free—to all children from birth to kindergarten age. If parents register their infants, kids can acquire a library of as many as sixty books of their very own by the time they're 5 years old. There are no requirements or strings

attached, just gifted books in children's hands.

Parton's goal for her Imagination Library is to inspire a love of reading in kids. Motivated by her own humble family background, she wishes to ensure that all children have books at home, regardless of the environment they live in.

"I'm a big believer in early reading," said Lynette Jennings, lead coordinator of the Port Townsend Rotary's Imagination Library affiliate. Research demonstrates that 90 percent of physical brain development occurs in the first three years of

life, and the presence of books at home supports a child's academic, social, and emotional development. In addition, reading together helps strengthen bonds between children and their parents or caregivers.

LOCAL IMAGINATION Library efforts began on Mother's Day 2021. Just over a year later, Jennings and her team had signed up nearly 400 kids out of an estimated 900 children under the age of 5 in the county, 800 of whom are reachable, she said. The numbers climb weekly. She is certain that by the end of this

year, the number of enrolled kids will be well over 50 percent of those who qualify and can be contacted.

"When we started, right away we engaged as many social service agencies as we could," said Jennings. Contacts were made at the Port Townsend and Jefferson County libraries, schools, Headstart, WIC (Women, Infants and Children) program, and other organizations. "We promote it like crazy, and of course, it's an easy sell," Jennings added. Word of mouth through the "mom network," as Jennings put it, helps considerably.

Parents or caregivers need only to fill out an application, found in many locations, including schools, the libraries, and WIC. Once they sign up, children's names and addresses are entered into the Imagination Library data system so that the children receive books addressed directly to them. Parents need not worry about privacy, Jennings emphasized; the data system's security is a huge priority for the Imagination Library organization.

Jennings noted that the gifted books are of excellent quality. A panel of consultants, including teachers and child psychologists, recommends potential books. The titles comprise a mix of classics, books by new authors, and stories representing diversity and inclusion. Bilingual books are available, and also braille offerings. The inside of every book flap is

a reader's guide for parents or caregivers, along with age-appropriate questions to engage a child and suggested projects to go with each story.

LAUNCHING THE LOCAL branch of Imagination Library was no small commitment, because kids are guaranteed a book every month. The noon Rotary Club raises money to support the project and its promise to deliver. The Imagination Library organization (found not only in the U.S., but also in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Canada, and Australia) pays for the cost of books and overhead.

Locally, the cost is \$25 per year per child, Jennings said, which basically covers the club's own overhead and postage. Rotary has been awarded a Washington State 50-50 matching grant for two years, and this grant can be extended if the number of registrants rises by 15 percent

each year. Jennings is proud that they have already met that 15 percent increase.

JENNINGS KNOWS the value of reading to young people. She read to her own children every night when they were little. Now, between them, she and her husband have six grandchildren. She has continued that reading priority with the grandkids because she knows it makes a difference. "I worry that children are not as prepared for reading—or for learning critical thinking—as they should be," she said.

Developing a love of reading can go a long way toward helping with reading readiness. Jennings said that some might think Imagination Library competes with programs offered by local libraries, which also emphasize reading readiness. In fact, it really enhances library efforts, she believes. "I think



it coincides beautifully with what libraries are doing," she said. For young parents who are busy tending to their families, Imagination Library books can help fill a literary gap and support budding young readers.

Melody Sky Weaver, director of the Port Townsend Public Library, agrees. It gets down to basics. "Imagination Library is putting more books in more kids' hands," she said. In fact, by August 2022, the worldwide organization had gifted more than 186 million books.

Coordinating the Jefferson County Imagination Library is exciting and ever so worthwhile, Jennings said. She said it's fun to see older siblings looking forward to books arriving in the mail so they can read them to their younger brothers and sisters. The whole family gets involved.

"We have a county that loves books, and it shows," Jennings said, adding, "The difference you make with children is long-lasting." 

To inquire about Imagination Library, email imaginationjeffco@gmail.com. Monetary contributions may be sent to PT Rotary Imagination Library, 2023 East Sims Way #172, Port Townsend, WA 98368.

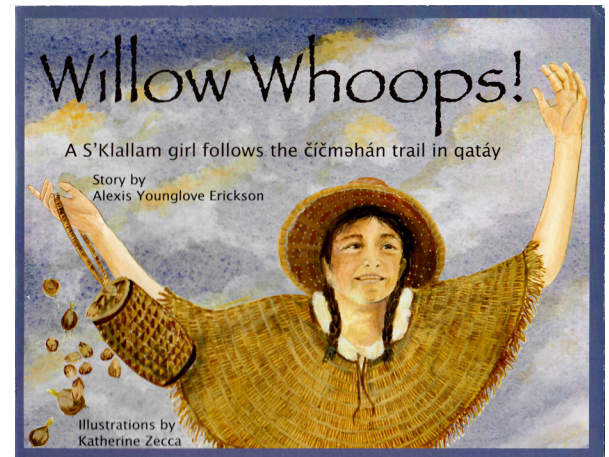


For Middle Readers

◆ *Willow Whoops*

Alexis Younglove Erickson (2021)

Among the many programs presented by the Port Townsend Public Library was one in July 2022 featuring new author Alexis Younglove Erickson. Folks gathered on the sunny library lawn to celebrate publication of Erickson's first book, historical fiction set on the S'Klallam tribal lands of qatáy, which later became Port Townsend. A citizen of the Jamestown S'Klallam tribe, Erickson says she always wanted to write stories for children. She and Port Townsend illustrator Katherine Zecca collaborated in real time to produce this book, and Erickson is already thinking about a sequel.



Willow is a young S'Klallam girl, harvesting camas bulbs to put by for the coming winter. Normally she loves this task because the camas bulbs are sweet, but today she is distracted. The day before, she had overheard her tribe's elders discussing possible war with arriving white settlers, and she fears for her father and brothers. Nine days later, Willow looks across the blue camas prairie to the giant rock where she sees tribal leader čičmáhán give a great whoop and throw off the blanket he has been sitting under—signaling that the S'Klallam people would not attack.

Suddenly joyful, Willow runs all over her village of qatáy, spreading the news of čičmáhán's great whoop. She stops at numerous places across the village, whooping as she goes and

anticipating how happy her grandmother and other villagers will be when they learn there is to be peace.

Although Willow is “a figment of [the author's] imagination,” the story is based on real events that took place around 1855. An informative and fun tale for any reader, the story was especially attractive to me, a Port Townsend resident, because of all the places the story visits. And every page teaches readers the meaning and pronunciation of a different word in the Klallam language. I wished this book had been around when my grandchildren were younger; it would have been fun to read together!

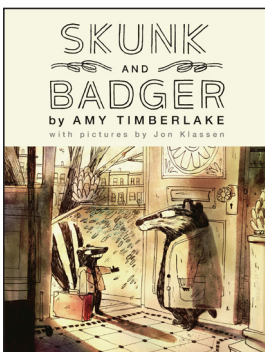
—Fran Post

◆ *Skunk and Badger*

Egg Marks the Spot

Amy Timberlake & Jon Klausen

(2020, 2021)



Badger likes everything just so. He likes his quiet life, his peaceful home, and most especially, he loves his neat and tidy rock collection. Imagine Badger's distress, then, when a small black and white fellow appears at the door, informing Badger that he, Skunk, will be Badger's new roommate. So begins the rollicking story, by Newbery Honor winner Amy Timberlake, of a truly unlikely pair.

Skunk is very excitable (not always good in a skunk) and really wants to help his new roommate; he's eager to help with household chores, and he is sure he can cheer up that boring old rock collection. Add some friendly (and book-loving) chickens and some very

sneaky stoats, and you've got the perfect recipe for reading fun. Younger middle-graders can certainly read *Skunk and Badger* on their own, but this book is just made for an adult and child to read aloud together. Most especially, the chicken parts. Fortunately for us, the odd couple returns for a second adventure in *Egg Marks the Spot*, featuring the “New Yak Times Book Review,” a pushy hedgehog, a long-lost agate, and a very memorable camping trip.

Both books offer more than laughs, however, as each teaches simple lessons about sharing, caring, and being open to new friends, regardless of how different from one's own self they may be.

—Kristine Kaufman


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Ranie Keithahn, ranie@olympus.net

Terrapin Architecture, Richard Berg,

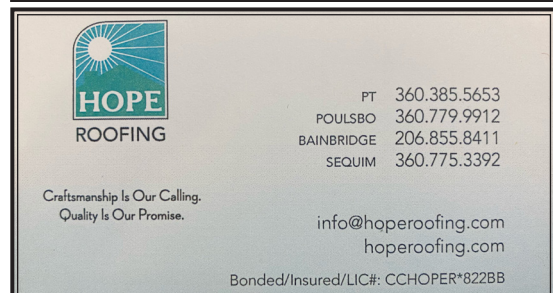
terrapinarchitecture.com

Wallyworks Enterprises, Malcom Dorn,

wallyworks.net

Yoga Port Townsend, Heather Sky,

yogaporttownsend.com



FRIENDS OF THE PORT TOWNSEND LIBRARY
P. O. BOX 452
PORT TOWNSEND, WA 98368

PLACE
STAMP
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LAST THIS YEAR!
October 15, 2022
BOOK SALE
Uptown Community Center



Who We Are

THE PORT TOWNSEND PUBLIC LIBRARY was founded in 1898 by volunteers and, thanks to continuing community support, has remained an active Carnegie Library since its present doors opened in 1913.

The Friends of the Port Townsend Library, established in 1978, supports programs, services, and materials beyond what the city's library budget covers. Every year we fund reading programs, events, and activities for all ages; we also hold book sales and publish three newsletters. Newsletters are available in the library, around town, and at friendsofptlibrary.org.

Our funding comes primarily from supporters, donations, and book sales. We invite anyone to become a Friend and attend our board meetings, which take place on the second Wednesday of each month, 3:30 PM, usually at the Library Learning Center (corner of Lawrence and Harrison). Please contact us by email at friendsofptlibrary@gmail.com for updates.

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