

# *TEXAS LIBRARY JOURNAL*

Volume 99, Number 3, Fall 2023

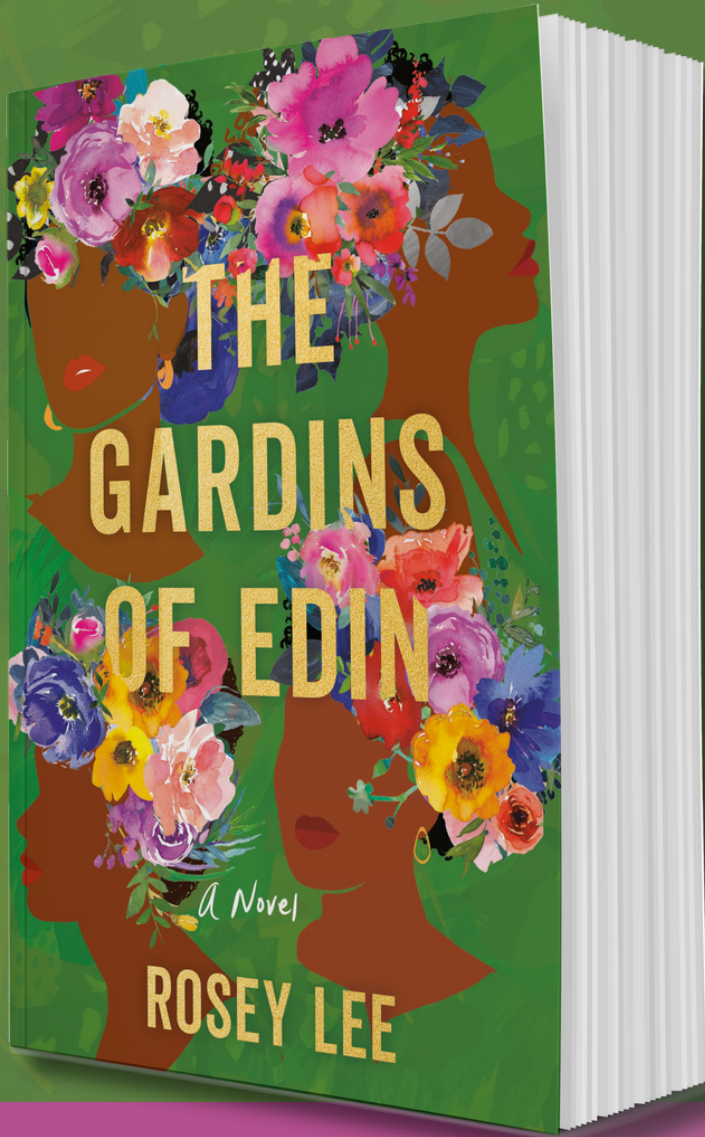
## **INSPIRING CONNECTIONS**

**Student Leader  
Organizes Against  
Book Bans**

**LAUNCH Inspires New  
Leaders**

**New Texas Law  
Causing Confusion**

**Four Strong Southern Women.  
One Influential Family.  
A Rift That Could Destroy a Legacy.**



When the bonds in their family begin to fray, Ruth, Naomi, Mary, and Martha Gardin fight to preserve their legacy, heal their wounds, and move forward together in this heartwarming contemporary debut novel with loose parallels to beloved women from the Bible.

**The Gardens of Edin | Rosey Lee | January 9, 2024  
ISBN: 9780593445495 TP | \$17.00 | 320 Pages**



**WATERBROOK**



# TEXAS LIBRARY JOURNAL

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Online community for TLA members  
[engage.txla.org](https://engage.txla.org)

# LJ&SLJ PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

This fall, we're offering **three workshops** designed to help library staff at all levels create physically and psychologically safer libraries



## Library De-escalation Training

2 Credit Hours | October 18 | Online



## Creating Safer Libraries: Foundations for Librarians and Frontline Staff Training

4 Credit Hours | November 29 | Online



## LJ Safety & Security Event

November 8, 2023 | Houston, TX

 **HOUSTON  
PUBLIC  
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Building**



For discounted group rates, contact [jknowles@mediasourceinc.com](mailto:jknowles@mediasourceinc.com)



# President's Perspective

By Gretchen Pruett

## IT HAS BEEN A HOT AND EVENTFUL SUMMER

and I am looking forward to cooler weather and the holiday season. No matter what type of library you are affiliated with, the holidays are a special time when we find common purpose in joy, love, and thankfulness. I would like to share what I am thankful for this fall as your TLA President.

I am thankful for the Conference Planning Committee (CPC) and the outstanding work they have done under the leadership of two incredible co-chairs, Kate Horan and Wendy Pray. These two women are very busy in their everyday lives, but still said yes when I asked them to serve. The CPC worked with me and my vision to select a conference theme that resonates with all of us – **Stories Inspire, Opportunities Await**. Everywhere I go, I have an opportunity to share stories I've collected from my counterparts from all types of libraries of how libraries serve their communities. Our stories have power because they are true, and they evoke empathy from those who hear them. We must continue to collect and use our stories to remind people why libraries of all types matter today.

I am also thankful for Dorcas Hand and her collaborators who presented the Library Ecosystem framework to us at this summer's Officer Governance Training & Workshop (formerly known as Annual Assembly). The theme of last year's conference — Libraries Unite — started the discussion of the many, many commonalities between all library types. The idea of the "Ecosystem" expands this concept and illustrates how we all intersect with the individuals we serve throughout



their lives, working together to help a person live their best life. It reminds us that a gap in the service to a person hurts them and their chances of success down the road. An attack on any library is ultimately an attack on every library and all must unite to protect library services. Again, stories (with data) are our most powerful tool in this fight.

Last and not least — I am thankful for the team at the Texas Library Association led by Executive Director Shirley Robinson. She is the latest in a series of strong TLA leaders and she has been steadfast in her defense of librarians and librarianship. Shirley

and her team work tirelessly to ensure that our association remains the best state library association ever. The role of TLA President is very important, but we roll on and off every year. The association staff is constant. Their work supporting the board and the membership, looking for continuous improvement in everything we do, is critical. Change can be painful, but the last few years have convinced me it is inevitable, and improvement is only achieved through change.

So go out, collect and tell your stories, and share them across the state. Our work and our futures depend on it!

*Gretchen Pruett*

Gretchen Pruett  
2023-24 TLA President

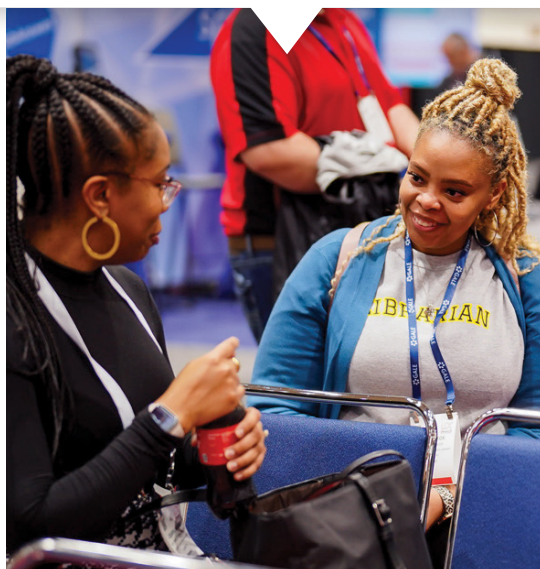
# 2024 Membership Opens October 2

[txla.org/join](https://txla.org/join)



**THE LIBRARY LEARNING EXPERIENCE**

AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION



# SAVE THE DATE!

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**Registration Opens October 2023.**

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# Autumn Adventures Await

## TEXAS LIBRARY ASSOCIATION FALL EVENTS

By Michele Chan Santos

I'M SO EXCITED TO BE WRITING MY FIRST "EDITOR'S LETTER" for the *Texas Library Journal*! I've been working for TLA since 2019 as a marketing specialist and as the assistant editor for the *Journal*. I've gotten to know so many of you in your roles as TLA volunteers, and from interviewing members for articles and the TLA podcast. It's always an inspiration to learn about the many ways you serve your communities! I've recently been promoted to Editor of the *Texas Library Journal* (part of my new position as TLA Communications and Grants Manager) so you will be hearing more from me in this space.

This morning, I was outside at 6:30 a.m. with our little dog, and was delighted to feel the comfortable pre-dawn temperature of 72 degrees (all too briefly). It gave me hope that fall temperatures will soon be here to stay. Weather notwithstanding, TLA has a host of exciting events planned for this fall, and you are all invited!

**Fall TLA District Meetings.** These gatherings are a fantastic way to meet librarians from your area, share insights, and learn from experts within our vibrant community. To find your local meeting, simply [visit our district meetings page](#). Whether the meeting lasts for a half day or a full day, we promise it will be time well-spent. The more intimate size of district meetings means you'll have a better opportunity to connect with public, academic, school and special librarians from your city and region.

**TLA Talks webinars (October, November).** Our October 17 TLA Talks is "Connecting All Texans to the Internet," and features Cindy Fisher, Senior Broadband Development Coordinator for the Texas Broadband Development Office. Libraries are important partners in the work to make universal internet access a reality; learn how you can participate. Our November 14 TLA Talks, "Kittens in the Library - Community Partnerships at Georgetown Public Library," will showcase the value of collaborative efforts between public libraries and community groups. [Learn more about TLA Talks](#).

**Texas Book Festival (Nov. 11-12, 2023)** Book lovers, this is one of the best events of the year! Great presentations, author panels, booths and more at this always-free event near the Capitol in downtown Austin. Keep an eye out for the presentation of the Texas Bluebonnet 2024-2025 Master List,



and make sure to visit our TLA booth when you're at the [book festival](#).

**TLA 2024 conference registration and 2024 membership renewal open October 2.** It's not too early to plan to renew your TLA membership and schedule your trip to the TLA 2024 Annual Conference, April 16-19 in San Antonio. You can view [2024 membership rates](#), 2024 conference registration rates, and [book your hotel](#).

Looking forward to seeing you in person or virtually soon!

*Michele Chan Santos*

Michele Chan Santos  
Communications and Grants Manager





# Using Children's Literature to Boost Emotional Resilience During Challenging Times

By Terri Harkey

As our students grow and navigate the world around them, they face a multitude of challenges and experiences that can impact their emotional well-being. From dealing with stressors such as schoolwork, friendships, family dynamics, and global pandemics to managing difficult emotions like sadness, anxiety, and anger, it's important for children to develop emotional resilience to cope with the challenges they constantly face in today's world.

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Children's literature can be a powerful tool for building resilience and teaching about emotions and empathy.

1. **Developing Empathy:** Children's literature often tells stories about characters who experience a range of emotions and challenges. When children can relate to characters in stories, they may be more likely to see things from someone else's perspective and develop greater compassion for others.
2. **Learning Coping Strategies:** Many children's books feature characters who overcome obstacles and challenges using different coping strategies. For example, a character might take deep breaths to calm down when feeling angry or use positive self-talk to boost self-confidence. Reading



about these strategies can help children learn new ways to manage their own emotions and cope with difficult situations.

3. **Building Self-Esteem:** Children's literature also features characters who overcome challenges and achieve their goals. When children see characters in stories who struggle and succeed, they may feel more confident in their own ability to overcome challenges and achieve their own goals.
4. **Teaching Perseverance:** Children's books often depict characters who face setbacks and challenges but continue to persevere. By reading about these characters, children can learn the importance of bouncing back from difficult situations. This can help children develop the resilience they need to overcome challenges and setbacks in their own lives.

There are many wonderful picture books that can help boost emotional resilience in children. For example, *The Dot* by Peter H. Reynolds teaches the importance of persistence and creativity, *Jabari Jumps* by Gaia Cornwall teaches overcoming fears, *The Kissing Hand* by Audrey Penn teaches

about separation anxiety and coping strategies, and *The Invisible Boy* by Trudy Ludwig teaches children empathy and understanding for others. Older children can learn through following characters in novels such as *Wishtree* by Katherine Applegate which teaches respect for others; *Fish in a Tree* by Lynda Mullaly Hunt, which teaches kindness, empathy and perseverance; *Out of My Mind* by Sharon Draper, which teaches empathy and understanding of others, and *Restart* by Gordon Korman, which teaches character development. For more literature ideas, please visit my [SMORE](#) site.

Children's literature can be a powerful tool for building emotional resilience in children. By featuring characters who overcome challenges and develop resilience, children can learn important coping strategies and develop empathy and understanding for others. Librarians, teachers, parents and caregivers can use children's literature as a starting point for conversations about emotions and resilience, helping children to develop the skills they need to navigate the challenges of growing up.

Happy Reading!

*Terri Harkey is the Texas Bluebonnet Award Coordinator and a retired school librarian who was named Teacher of the Year three times.*

# LIBRARY FOR A-A-A-A-ALL!

## President Obama makes a guest appearance in Harris County PL's TikTok video

By Michele Chan Santos

When Linda Stevens, Division Director of Programs, Partnerships and Outreach at Harris County Public Library, first got the message that the American Library Association had called, she was puzzled. The caller had mentioned that a “major influencer” wanted to work with HCPL — but wouldn’t say who.

Turns out that “major influencer” was a high-wattage one: former President Barack Obama.

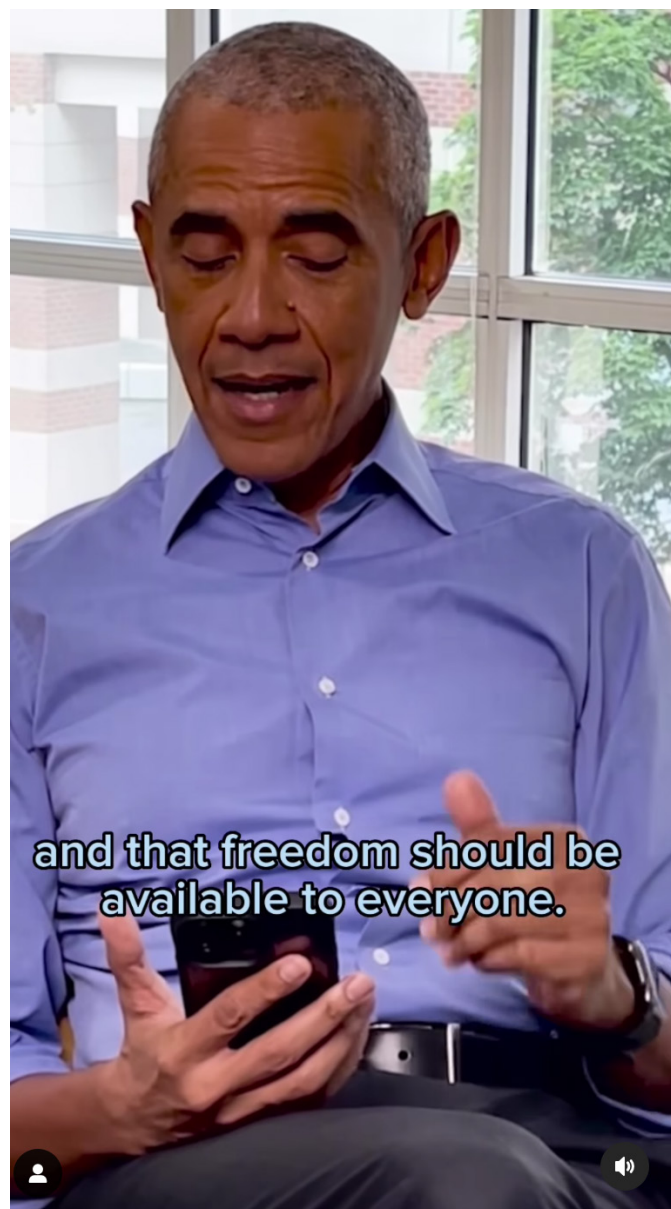
Obama and his wife, former First Lady Michelle Obama, have been outspoken in their support of libraries. His [open letter](#), shared on July 17, supports America’s librarians in an era of rising book challenges.

In coordination with the letter, the Obama Foundation worked with four libraries from around the country. Obama appeared in TikTok videos for each of the libraries – and in HCPL’s case, he co-starred with one of the Texas library world’s most iconic figures – Curbside Larry! Played by John Schaffer, program production specialist at HCPL, Curbside Larry became famous during the pandemic, when he promoted the library in spots that spoofed used-car TV ads (“everything here is FREE, FREE, FREE!”)

[Their video together](#) has more than 465,000 views on Instagram and thousands more on other social media channels. The other libraries involved were Kankakee (IL) Public Library, Prince George’s County (MD) Memorial Library, and Woodland (CA) Public Library. (You can see all four videos [here](#).)

How did the video come together? We talked with Stevens, Schaffer and Nancy Hu, design and communications manager at HCPL, about this exciting project.

“It happened very fast,” Schaffer said. The Obama Foundation chose to contact them since they had heard of the popularity of the earlier Curbside Larry videos, as well as other social media efforts from HCPL. Shortly after HCPL was contacted, “we were on a Zoom call and I had brainstormed







*“How did you get him? Curbside Larry is so hard to book.”*



and come up with a few rough ideas. It was Edward (HCPL Executive Director Edward Melton), Linda, Nancy, a person from the Obama Foundation and a consultant out of Los Angeles on the call. I pitched a few ideas and they chose one.” (When it turned out they wanted to see the script the next day) “I thought – wait, what, tomorrow?” he added, laughing.

Said Hu, “We didn’t know what the other libraries were going for. We like to lean on humor. Happily they said, ‘I think he would prefer it.’ That he was open to that was wonderful to hear.” (In [the video](#), Curbside Larry’s voice travels throughout the building, and Obama admonishes him to use a quieter, library voice.)

The Obama Foundation wanted to amplify campaigns that each library was already conducting, Hu said. In HCPL’s case, that meant the [#LibraryforAll](#) campaign: “Harris County Public Library strives to create a welcoming & inclusive environment where all people feel they belong: All races and ethnicities. All ages. All capabilities. All beliefs. All genders and orientations. This library is for all people.”

Did the Houston librarians actually get to meet the former president? Unfortunately, no.

“We didn’t get to speak to him directly,” Schaffer said. “He was on a deadline so he could go to Greece for a conference” (the SNF Nostos conference.) “We shot a temporary version of the script. I read his lines so he could see it. He filmed his version (with the foundation staff) and they sent that back to us. Then we filmed a better version of our part and spliced it together.”

Added Hu, “We shared the finished video with them, gave them the opportunity for edits, they loved it, and had all positive comments.”

“We’ve gotten thousands of likes and hundreds of comments, very endearing comments,” Hu said.

Stevens’ favorite comment was: “How did you get him? Curbside Larry is so hard to book.”

What’s next for Curbside Larry?

“I don’t know why he’s as popular as he is, I really don’t,” Schaffer said (he’s even received a knitted version of Curbside Larry that he keeps in his office.) “But I’m happy to put on the hat as long as it’s doing some good.”

*Michele Chan Santos is the Communications and Grants Manager at the Texas Library Association.*



*Photo courtesy of Brandeis University*

# STUDENTS IGNITING THE SPARK

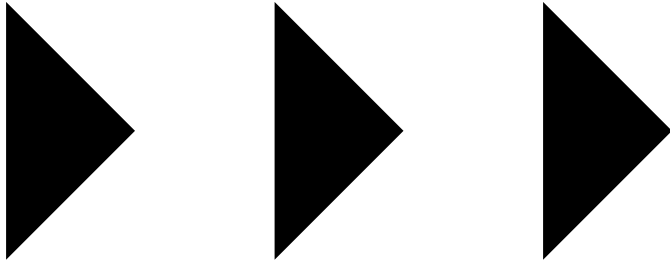
By Carolyn Foote

**I FIRST MET CAMERON SAMUELS**, then a junior in Katy ISD, in the fall of 2021 as book-banning issues were starting to ramp up. Over the last two years, we have engaged in ongoing conversations, attended or spoken at rallies together, been panelists in webinars, and lobbied legislators. Cameron (who prefers they/them pronouns) has continued working as a student activist now that they attend Brandeis University.

In the last year they became an honorary chair of National Banned Books week in 2022 and were honored by GLAAD (a non-profit organization focused on LGBTQ advocacy and cultural change). In addition, Cameron has been [featured by \*Teen Vogue\*](#) as one of the magazine's "21 under 21," and most recently started a student group called [Students Engaged in Advancing Texas \(SEAT\)](#). It was an honor to talk with Cameron about their activism as a student because their work inspires others.

## **WHAT MOTIVATED YOU TO SPEAK UP AND GET INVOLVED IN THE FIRST PLACE?**

When Katy ISD began pulling books from school libraries, I knew that I was not the only student in a district of 90,000 that felt marginalized by these book bans. As a non-binary student who uses gender-neutral pronouns, my time in high school was defined by a diverse education but also the challenges of queer youth. Many of my friends come from less accepting families than mine, and that left them feeling powerless amid censorship of LGBTQ+ websites and library books. Building a social movement, with these friends involved on the forefront and behind-the-scenes, was how we envisioned transforming the oppressive power structures in our school district.



“People often say young people will save us, but our generation is already doing the work.”

#### **DID YOUR SPEAKING UP ENCOURAGE OTHER STUDENTS OR PARENTS TO GET INVOLVED?**

At the Katy ISD board meeting in November 2021, I was the only student present and the only voice opposing censorship. After addressing the board, I was met with stares from the community as I returned to my seat, including those who now have been elected to the board on their censorious platform. This was an isolating experience to not feel welcomed where my own school district was developing policy, but meanwhile, it was inspiring to many students and community members statewide. There was a whole crew supporting us at the very next meeting, and just three months after that first time speaking, we packed the board room full of queer students and LGBTQ+ allies. It only took one person to ignite a spark and start our social movement. That's exactly what we did in Katy, and it can happen everywhere.

#### **HOW HAS YOUR WORK EXPANDED SINCE SPEAKING UP?**

Through months of fighting internet censorship with complaints filed by the ACLU and distributing hundreds of banned books to protest book bans, we had national attention on our student-led efforts. Many of our policy wins included dismantling the LGBTQ+ internet filter, unblocking the Trevor Project on school internet, and successfully defending many books like *Maus* by Art Spiegelman and *Flamer* by Mike Curato. We knew this work could not continue growing without establishing a vehicle for community progress, and that's when Students Engaged in Advancing Texas (SEAT) arose. We introduced state legislation like House Bill 1945 and Senate Bill 2321 in the 88th Texas Legislature to ensure students are protected from discrimination and have a voice on school boards. During the debate over House Bill (HB) 900, we worked with senators to propose amendments to the legislation for accountability and nondiscrimination protections. People often say young people will save us, but our generation is already doing the work. The time is now to confront historical oppression.

#### **WHAT KIND OF SUPPORT HAVE YOU HAD THAT HELPED YOU REACH MORE PEOPLE?**

Building powerful relationships with policymakers, the press, and organizations has tremendously driven our movement forward. Social movements are built on these powerful

relationships that help us elevate our voices, reclaim the narrative, and become the decision-makers to our own education. Our initial platform was made possible by the press who uplifted our voice to reach the broader community, gaining traction and community support while simultaneously pressuring the district to comply with nondiscrimination. Non-profit organizations and publishers donated the books we distributed, and that was only made possible by our coalition building with local leaders. Without the support from legislators, our bills and amendments would have had no home in the Capitol. Everyone has something to contribute, and it's these contributions that make our work possible.

#### **ANY TIPS FOR OTHER STUDENTS WANTING TO GET INVOLVED IN FIGHTING CENSORSHIP?**

Students should come together and stand up for our rights. A discriminatory policy is not a policy we should stand for, nor may it even be legal or constitutional. There are always people around who are passionate about progress, though it may require a leader to ignite the movement. [Students Engaged in Advancing Texas](#) is here to work with students who have the passion but not necessarily the comfort or means to organize alone. Our website at [studentsengaged.org](https://studentsengaged.org) has resources to get started.

*Carolyn Foote is a retired school librarian and one of the founders of #FREedomFighters.*



*Bea Saba was part of a group of library leaders, authors and educators who visited Kenya this past summer. They enjoyed visiting the Giraffe Centre and local schools.*



# KARIBU (WELCOME)

## A Library Director's Journey to Kenya

By Bea Saba



### **LITERACY ONLY BEGINS AT AN EARLY AGE,**

**RIGHT?** This is the old belief that we all need to remove from our teachings and vernacular.

Though literacy from an early age can definitely be a great asset; it is not the only blueprint to sustainable development. Libraries have followed the maxim to “meet them where they are” for centuries. Libraries go into communities to reach those who may not be able to visit in-person and provide programs and services that meet the needs of those communities. Regardless of where one is on their literacy journey, libraries provide what is needed, when it is needed. That is the goal of [Kenya Connect](#), a literacy organization that empowers students, teachers and community members

in rural Kenya to succeed in the 21st century by meeting their students, teachers and community where they are.

My recent visit to Kenya with 20 other like-minded librarians, authors, educators, photographers, audiovisual/film producers and young leaders gave me a deeper understanding of the importance of literacy and why I chose to serve my community as a librarian.

Kenya Connect uses a multi-pronged approach that connects students, teachers, and parents to the wonder, knowledge, and joy of books. Their library has over 30,000 books in English and Kiswahili.

In 2018, Kenya Connect launched the first ever Library Card program in Wamunyu Village (a town in rural Kenya) with

parents enrolling their children to receive a library card for one dollar. These student-specific cards connected to an “I Love Reading” lanyard, allow students to borrow books from the Kenya Connect Library. Having parents spending \$1 for the library cards makes them feel like they’ve invested something good for their children’s education and have a stake in it. Currently over 6,000 cards have been issued at 30 partner schools with plans to expand the program to all 62 partner schools. Their Magic School Bus and Reading Rover Truck are mobile libraries.

We visited the Kenya Connect headquarters in Wamunyu Village and were greeted with songs and flowers. We toured the facility and were in awe of all the things they do. Kenya Connect believes that academic achievement equals lifelong success, which builds a “village that reads.”

Their learning resources and computer lab is where students and teachers come to learn coding, robotics, 3D printing and many other technology-related skills. Their teacher development program trains teachers to incorporate technology into their classrooms, as well as making sure students are equipped with Chromebooks. The new addition to the facility is the Learning Library Center, opened in 2022 to serve the needs of the community. This is the community library that houses books, maker space supplies like games, art supplies, sewing machines and more. With an equipped librarian in tow, the center creates programs that encourage interest, excitement and passion for reading in Wamunyu.

The LitMoms program brings women together and empowers them to use books to tell stories with their children and grandchildren. This program brings storytelling to a whole new level by creating a space to introduce children’s book stories to mothers and grandparents, then in turn having them sharing those stories (at times in freestyle or through memory or pictures) with their little ones to encourage reading aloud and love of lifelong reading. What a powerful message

about the importance of reading and how sharing books aloud helps develop future leaders in women, their children and grandchildren.

In addition to being inspired by the transformational work of Kenya Connect, our itinerary was jam-packed with cultural, educational, safari and fun escapades. The adventure started at the Giraffe Centre, where we fed graceful giraffes. Then to the Elephant Orphanage, a place of rescue for baby elephants and rhinos, that are reintegrated to the wild after being nursed back to health. We attended a book signing at the Text Book Center, inside one of Kenya’s most popular shopping malls. We had two Newbery-Award winning authors in our group, Kwame Alexander (who organized our trip) and Jerry Craft, who spoke and signed books for their fans.

Our adventure continued with school visits, reading to the children, engaging with teachers, workshops with educators and librarians through conversation and collaboration. Our hearts were filled with joy knowing that our mission was received well. Our trip concluded at Maasai (Masai) Mara as we visited the tribe and participated in crowning the man who jumped the highest in a ceremony proving strength, respect, admiration and maturity as a courageous warrior. At the Masai Mara, we stayed on the banks of the Mara River. There we were immersed in the heart of the action and witnessed up close the “Big Five” (elephant, rhino, lion, leopard and Cape buffalo) and many other fauna indigenous in the ‘Circle of Life,’ where everything you see exists together in a delicate balance.

When I look back on this trip in later years, the things that will stay with me the most are community, camaraderie, literacy advocacy, Safari and mission work. The picture book I will equate to my experience is *Imani’s Moon* by Janay Brown-Wood. It is a great story about the power of believing in oneself and inspiring young people of their potential to reach the moon. That’s what I think Kenya Connect does by engaging and empowering success of those they reach.



*Beatrice Saba is the Library Director at the Bryan + College Station Public Library System*

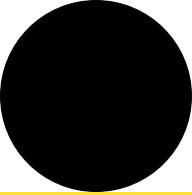


***Esther Muinde, the librarian at Kenya Connect, with Bea Saba (right)***



***Author Kwame Alexander meets with young fans in Kenya.***





# New Texas Law Requiring Vendors to Rate Books is Causing Confusion and Consternation

By Wendy Woodland

For almost two years, Texas librarians have faced increased scrutiny on the content of collections, policies for purchasing books, and processes for removing books from a collection. While school libraries are bearing the brunt of this coordinated campaign, public libraries are receiving increasing numbers of challenges and feeling the pressure to remove books from their collections.

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As one school librarian shared, “Librarians are dealing with increased stress and anxiety with the anticipation of book challenges and threats of arrest for placing books some people deem obscene in libraries.” Another noted, “The narrative that some people are pushing in the media that librarians have a hidden agenda to harm children is appalling and so harmful. Librarians love kids and our only agenda is to help students access resources that meet their academic needs and support their personal reading interests. We are not only bound by our professional ethics, but our contracts also require us to adhere to all local school board policies, as well as state and federal laws.”

The recent Texas Legislative Session reflected this charged climate with an unprecedented number of bills filed that directly or indirectly sought to regulate the materials that libraries could purchase and the programs they could offer. Legislation seeking to make librarians the targets of criminal prosecution for purchasing books in the course of their jobs was also proposed.

All told, the Texas Library Association (TLA) tracked more than 35 bills that would have directly impacted librarians.

One bill that passed, HB 900, the READER Act (Restricting Explicit and Adult-Designated Educational Resources) requires the Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSLAC),

with State Board of Education (SBOE) approval, to adopt mandatory school library collection development standards; defines sexually explicit and sexually relevant material; requires vendors to assign ratings to material they (the vendor) identify as sexually explicit or sexually relevant; and gives TEA the authority to review ratings and require vendors to change the ratings if TEA determines a different rating should be applied.

Governor Greg Abbott signed [HB 900](#) on June 13 and the bill was scheduled to become effective on September 1. According to the law, the new TSLAC mandatory collection development standards would be final January 1, 2024, and vendors would be required to submit their first list of rated books to the Texas Education Agency on April 1, 2024.

Despite that timeline, lack of information about how the new law would be implemented led to a great deal of confusion and uncertainty among school librarians and district administrators. Some districts even decided to conduct their own internal review of their collection to try to identify material that might be rated sexually explicit or sexually relevant, while others put a hold on purchasing new books.

Vendors struggled with how they would be able to provide ratings on books they had previously sold to Texas school districts that remain in active use, and rate new books they planned to offer for sale. Smaller vendors, faced with this daunting task and expense, were likely to be unable to sell in Texas. Independent bookstores across the state that sell to many teachers, librarians and school districts were also concerned about a significant reduction in their sales as they do not have the resources to rate materials. Additionally, it is unlikely that online vendors such as Amazon will provide ratings, and therefore, they will not be able to sell to Texas school districts.

Librarians are concerned about the confusion that will be caused by inconsistent ratings among vendors, and the inability to purchase books from independent booksellers





or online vendors such as Amazon. “If one of my vendors designates a title as sexually relevant, but another approved vendor does not rate it at all, how will the librarian determine which is correct?” asked one librarian.

On July 25, a [lawsuit](#) was filed in the U.S. Western District Court by the American Booksellers Association, Association of American Publishers, Authors Guild, Comic Book Legal Defense Fund and two Texas independent bookstores, BookPeople and Blue Willow Bookshop. The lawsuit states that HB 900 violates the first and fourteenth amendments by regulating speech “with over broad and vague” terms that target protected speech.

On August 18, U.S. District Judge Alan D. Albright heard arguments on the state’s request to dismiss the lawsuit and on the plaintiffs’ request for a preliminary injunction to prohibit the state from enforcing the law. On August 31, Judge Albright announced that he was granting a temporary injunction to keep the state from enforcing any part of the law. His written order explaining his reasoning for this [decision](#) was released the week of September 18. The state is expected to appeal this decision to the U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals.

While the state is currently prohibited from enforcing the law’s requirements, the idea of rating materials as sexually explicit or sexually relevant has gained traction in some areas of the state. Using HB 900’s definitions and requirements as a guide, groups and individuals are advocating for schools, and in some cases public libraries, to remove materials they believe are sexually explicit, and restrict materials they deem

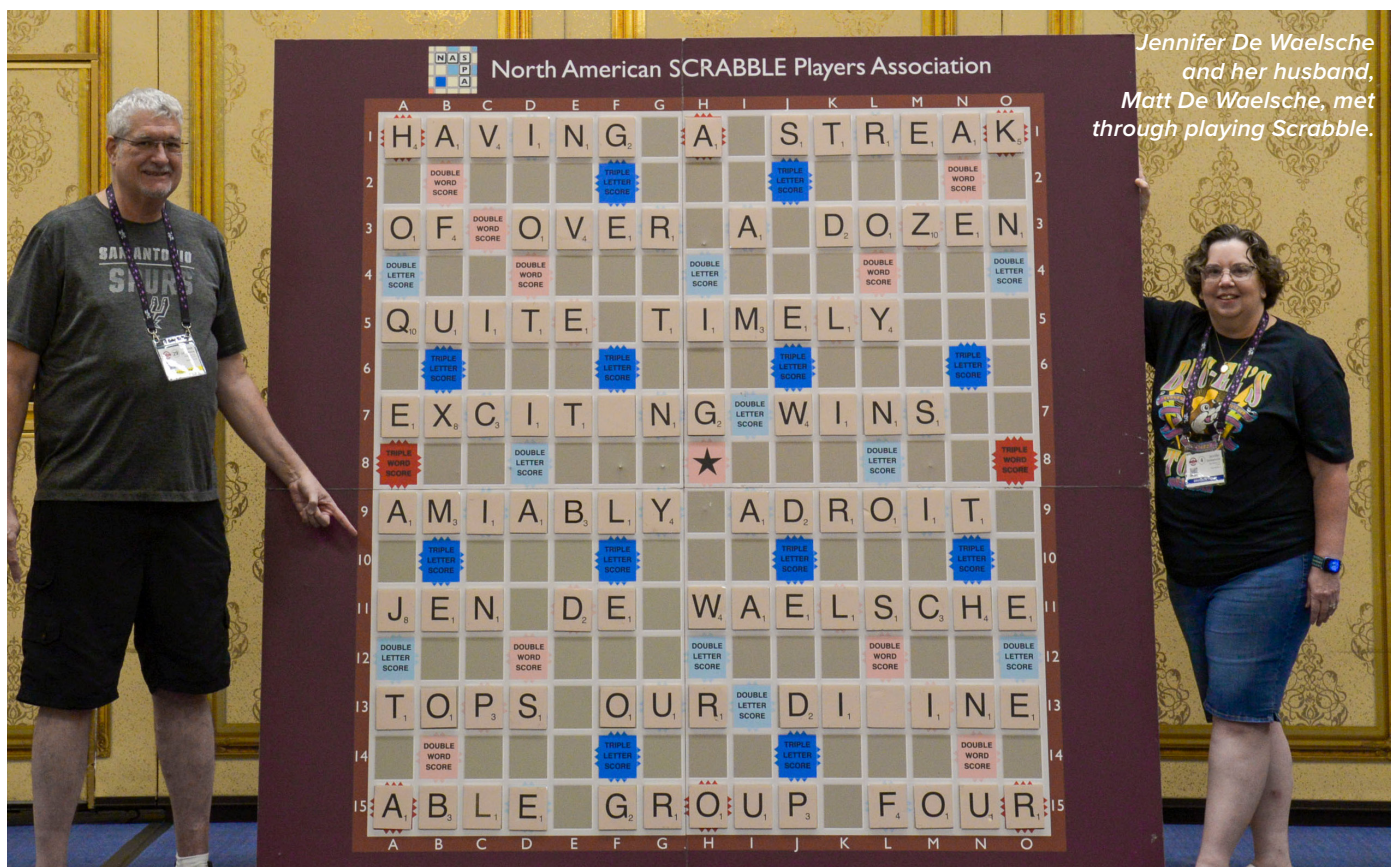
to be sexually relevant to require parental consent before being checked out.

In this charged environment, keeping the lines of communication open with school administrators, managers and elected officials is essential to ensuring that school and public libraries remain empowered to serve the entire community.

“We have strengthened our communication about the collection development policy and process with our school community. We have also made sure to share information on the options parents and guardians have to select books for their own children, and how the reconsideration policy works,” shared one school librarian. “Additionally, we have looked at our collection development policy each year to make sure that it continues to be a rigorous process. We also embedded practice scenarios for addressing parental concerns about books in the professional development offered to our librarians, which has been very valuable.”

TLA is here to support librarians as they navigate these turbulent times. We have information related to [HB 900](#) and tools and resources to support [intellectual freedom](#) in all types of libraries on our website. If you are experiencing a challenge, or just have questions about how to prepare in the event a challenge comes your way, reach out to the [TLA Helpline](#).

*Wendy Woodland is the Director of Advocacy and Communications at the Texas Library Association.*



Jennifer De Waelsche  
and her husband,  
Matt De Waelsche, met  
through playing Scrabble.

WORD SKILLS  
SPELL VICTORY

## for Texas Librarian in National Scrabble Players Championship

By Michele Chan Santos

Like all librarians, Jennifer De Waelsche loves words. She's turned her love of books and the written word into not just her profession, but her second career, as a nationally-ranked Scrabble player.

At the Scrabble Players Championship in Las Vegas in July, De Waelsche came in first place in Division 4, winning \$3,000 and a crystal trophy. De Waelsche was the only female winner out of six divisions. (By day, she's the librarian at Burbank High School in San Antonio.)

Scrabble players are placed in divisions based on how many rating points they have (with every competition in a qualifying tournament, Scrabble players' ratings fluctuate). The top division has players rated over 1800;

Division 4, which she won, is comprised of players entering with less than 1150 points.

In the pro tournaments, Scrabble players don't use the wooden engraved tiles that ordinary lay people use. They use silkscreened or injection-molded tiles (with the wooden ones, it's possible to recognize by feel, when you reach into the bag, what letter tile you are touching, or to search around for the blank tiles, which are some of the most valuable as they can be played as any letter.) The competitors have special



boards with grids, and play is timed – each player gets 25 minutes, carefully monitored. It's like the Netflix series “The Queen's Gambit,” but with letter tiles instead of chess pieces.

Playing seven games a day for four days straight, in a huge ballroom filled with hundreds of other players from around the country and the world, De Waelsche was seeded fourth and expected to win 21 out of 31 games. Instead, she won 23 out of 31 games, including a magnificent 14-game winning streak. No other player in the tournament won that many games in a row.

“It was awesome,” De Waelsche said. “It's a very male-dominated field. No woman has ever won the top division. There are not as many highly-ranked women players. Maybe I'll work my way up.”

Being a librarian has made her a better Scrabble player, De Waelsche said. Formerly the librarian at Rogers Middle School, she used to run a weekly Scrabble club for her students. “When I was teaching the students, I was teaching myself at the same time,” she said. She hopes to start a Scrabble club at Burbank High School.

Reading a great deal also helps, giving



*Jennifer with Scrabble tournament executives Art Moore, John Merleau and John Chew in Las Vegas.*

her familiarity with many different words. As all top Scrabble players do, she studies the Scrabble Player's Handbook and an online resource called the “Cheat Sheet,” which lists hundreds of two and three-letter words that players can use to hook their word to another one. De Waelsche also studies bingo stems (a bingo in Scrabble is using all seven letter tiles in a single word, and is worth a 50-point bonus.) It's similar to studying for a spelling bee.

Scrabble is a family affair for De Waelsche, who met her husband, Matt

De Waelsche, while playing Scrabble at the San Antonio Scrabble Club. They are united in their love for words – he's a retired librarian who used to work at the San Antonio Public Library. He was inducted into the Texas Scrabble Hall of Fame in 2010 and has played in 19 national tournaments; but his wife has since surpassed him in career earnings.

The couple have presented workshops on starting a Scrabble club at your school (we hope to offer a virtual version of this workshop for TLA members soon.) Playing Scrabble, students learn a lot of words and can enter elementary-school Scrabble competitions. Scrabble teaches other life lessons, too.

“You learn patience, that you have to use what you get,” she said. “For kids, school Scrabble teaches them strategy, vocabulary and good sportsmanship.”

She and her husband play Scrabble games against each other on their phones, as well as playing other club members in San Antonio each week. De Waelsche glows when recalling her tournament victory.

“It was a great experience,” she said. “Scrabble is strategy and word knowledge – but it's also luck.”

*Michele Chan Santos is the Communications and Grants Manager at the Texas Library Association.*







# LAUNCH

## Lights a Spark for New Library Leaders

By Michele Chan Santos

The 2023 session of the LAUNCH leadership program, held July 27-29 in Austin, renewed and reinvigorated its participants, all emerging leaders who have worked five years or less in the library profession.

"Sometimes we need to get out of our daily routine, meet new people, and learn new things to ignite or reignite our spark. LAUNCH is the perfect way to ignite your spark in the library," said Emma McDonald, Director of Library Services at Mesquite ISD and one of the program instructors.

Carolyn Davis is the librarian at Canyon Ranch Elementary in Irving and was a LAUNCH participant. "I think the most rewarding part of LAUNCH was collaborating with librarians from a variety of libraries," she said. "It gave me insight into how we are the same and different. And I was able to grow my professional learning community."

The 40 attendees came from all over Texas. In this workshop, they learned and expanded their leadership skills through group work, self-directed learning, and internal reflection. LAUNCH took place at the Lone Star Court at the Domain, in North Austin.

The three instructors were McDonald; Roberto Zapata, Assistant Director of Customer Experience, Houston Public Library; and Lynda Infante Huerta, Faculty Librarian and Assistant Professor at Austin Community College.

Zapata said the most rewarding part of teaching at LAUNCH 2023 "was meeting a diverse and dynamic group of early career librarians that are doing amazing work in their communities. It

was inspiring to see new faces and hear different perspectives around diverse topics that we all face as library professionals. The future of libraries is in good hands!"

For Davis, one of the most significant lessons was when the group discussed emotional intelligence.

"My biggest takeaway was that it's not easy and it takes daily practice until it becomes more natural," Davis said. "My goal is to improve my emotional intelligence and become a better communicator."

For McDonald, the most memorable moment was not a single moment, but "watching this group of strangers become friends and colleagues over the weekend. This was really evident when on the second night a large group got together to plan a karaoke outing and dinner."

McDonald continued, "The most rewarding part about teaching LAUNCH 2023 was empowering other librarians in leadership skills they can use in any position or role. I loved hearing the ideas they generated when debriefing and thinking about how to apply their learning in their job."

Huerta encourages librarians with less than five years of experience to consider signing up for the program next year.

"TLA LAUNCH can really facilitate a network of peers to rely on and collaborate with throughout your career," Huerta said. "It is also a great way to learn how to get involved in TLA and offers great content on how to have crucial conversations, avoid burnout, deal with impostor syndrome, and become a better teammate."

*Michele Chan Santos is the Communications and Grants Manager at the Texas Library Association.*

*Clockwise from top:  
LAUNCH participants and leaders;  
a team-building exercise;  
TLA Executive Director Shirley  
Robinson with LAUNCH instructors.*

## Texas Great Read for 2023

The Texas Center for the Book is thrilled to announce the [Texas Great Read](#) titles for 2023! The Center has chosen *Nell Plants a Tree* by Anne Wynter, illustrated by Daniel Miyares, as the 2023 Texas Great Read Youth Selection and *West with Giraffes* by Lynda Rutledge as the 2023 Texas Great Read Adult Selection. Every year, the Library of Congress asks each state Center for the Book to select titles that represent the state's literary landscape to highlight at the National Book Festival, an event showcasing the importance of books and reading. The Texas Center for the Book invites Texans to read *Nell Plants a Tree* and *West with Giraffes* and to take part in a statewide book club by using the hashtag #TXGreatRead on social media. For more information on the 2023 Texas Great Read Program, visit [www.tsl.texas.gov/greatreadtexas](http://www.tsl.texas.gov/greatreadtexas).

## UPCOMING BOOK BAN WEBINAR FEATURING AUTHOR KELLY YANG

On October 3 at 6pm CT you are invited to join the webinar [“Off the Shelf: Book Challenges, Bans and Promoting Inclusive Literature”](#) with children's author Kelly Yang. This conversation will feature an author, a librarian, a student and a parent discussing the latest wave of book bans and explore the importance of inclusive children's and young adult literature. This event is hosted in partnership with AASL (American Association of School Librarians) and during ALA's (American Library Association) Banned Books week, which is October 1st - 7th. [Register here!](#)

## 2024 Membership & TLA 2024 Conference Registration Opening October 2

The theme for the TLA 2024 Conference is “Stories Inspire. Opportunities Await.”

Take charge of your future! The TLA 2024 Annual Conference is here to inspire library community members with heartfelt stories, fresh perspectives, innovative education and more. Come find the tools to help you better serve your communities. **Conference registration and 2024 membership open on October 2.** We will post updates in TLA Engage and on TLA's Facebook page and other social media accounts.



## TLA AWARDS & SCHOLARSHIPS ARE OPEN

Applications for TLA awards and scholarships are open. More information about scholarships can be found [here](#); learn about the TLA Awards [here](#). We know there is so much amazing work being done in Texas libraries; please apply to help your work get recognized.

## TLA GRANTS

Applications for the [J. Frank Dobie Library Trust Grant](#), the [Jeannette and Jim Larson Grant](#) (mystery genre) and the [Woll Memorial Fund](#) are open.

## FY 2024 TEXAS FAMILY PLACE LIBRARIES GRANT OPEN FOR APPLICATION

The 2024 Texas Family Place Libraries Grant Program opened for application on September 1. Grant guidelines for the program, as well as specific information about the application process, past recipients, and additional resources are on the [TSLAC Family Place Libraries Project](#) page. Applications will be due Sunday, October 1, 2023.

The Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSLAC) initiated the [Family Place Libraries™ Project](#) in 2015 to help public libraries address early learning with a goal of ensuring that all children enter school ready and able to learn. The TSLAC Family Place Libraries™ Project funds tuition for up to two staff members from participating Texas libraries to attend the Family Place Libraries™ Training Institute. After attending the Institute, participating Texas libraries are eligible for a grant of \$6000 from State funds to assist with the development of their Family Place Libraries™ program.



## Conversations for Community Digital Success

This fall, the Texas Library Association, in partnership with the Texas State Library and Archives Commission and other community partners, will coordinate in-person community conversations with library professionals all over the state. The goal is to engage civic leaders in proactive discussion about the role public libraries play in digital navigation programs and in improving digital access and literacy for their local communities.

Potential themes for these conversations will include digital literacy training, reaching underserved populations (such as low-income families, rural communities, and people with disabilities), supporting local students, providing technical support, closing the digital divide and more. At each meeting, there will be a panel discussion followed by a Q&A, and deeper discussions in small groups.

Sharing resources, making connections and cultivating community-based partnerships can help to expand and promote services and training and lead to solutions to enhance digital services and literacy throughout Texas.

## ASHLEY BRYAN AWARD NOMINATIONS OPEN

The Ashley Bryan Award, established in 2023 by the TLA Black Caucus Round Table (BCRT), honors a Black author for their body of work on an odd year and a new talent Black author debut work on an even year; for contribution to highlighting and promoting humanity, diversity, culture, and community in children's literature. The Ashley Bryan awards recipient will be selected based on their outstanding contribution to literature that promotes people of color and fosters community, while creating opportunities for our experiences in humanity. Winners will receive \$1,000 and a plaque.

[Nominate here.](#)

## CONGRATULATIONS TO THE TALL TEXANS CLASS OF 2023!

The TALL Texans Leadership Development Institute (TALL Texans) is a transformational leadership program that helps participants learn and embrace their potential to take new initiatives for their institutions, profession, and stakeholders. TALL Texans takes place in person at Montserrat Retreat Center, Lake Dallas from November 12-16, 2023.



**Monica Babaian**, Fort Bend ISD  
**Johana Orellana Cabrera**, Arlington Public Library  
**Pamela Carlile**, New Braunfels Public Library  
**Julie Crisafulli**, Mansfield Public Library  
**Jean Darnell**, Pflugerville ISD  
**Brittnee Emerine**, Plano Public Library  
**Betsy Evans**, Sul Ross State University (Alpine)  
**Anne Farley**, Pasadena ISD  
**Kristen Fournier**, Round Rock ISD  
**Heather Garavaglia**, Prosper ISD  
**Shawn Goforth**, Fort Worth Public Library  
**Morgan Green-Griffin**, City of Plano  
**Jessica Hedrick**, Point Isabel ISD  
**Katherine Hooker**, Southwestern University (Georgetown)  
**Amanda Hunt**, New Braunfels ISD  
**Lauren Jones**, Mesquite ISD  
**Sheena Kelly**, Houston Public Library

**Kimberly Kinnaird**, Lewisville ISD  
**Emily Kupersztach**, Round Rock ISD  
**Rose Lerma**, Grayson College (Denison)  
**Fen Lu**, UT Arlington  
**Shaun McDonald**, Amarillo Public Library  
**Amy Milstead**, Mesquite ISD  
**Abby Moore**, Breckenridge ISD  
**Charlotte Polk**, Brenham ISD  
**Karina Quilantan**, Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD  
**Stephanie Galvan Russell**, Pflugerville ISD  
**Becca Sexton**, Georgetown Public Library  
**Erin Smith**, Harlingen Public Library  
**Lindsey Snelling**, Rockwall County Public Library  
**Dawn Terrizzi**, Denton Public Library  
**Regina Vitolo**, Harris County Public Library  
**Natalie Watts**, North East ISD  
**Audrey Wilson-Youngblood**, Tarrant County College  
**Leslie Whitaker**, Claude ISD



# Register for your Fall District Meeting

Registration opened September 1 for our District Fall Meetings. District meetings provide regional settings for presenting continuing education, carrying on legislative activities, and recruiting members. The annual fall meetings are an opportunity for local librarians, para-professionals, and trustees from all types of libraries to meet, network, and set a foundation for collaborative efforts.

[Full details and link to register here.](#)



## District 1 Fall Meeting | September 23

Stephens Central Library, San Angelo | 9am–1pm

## District 2 Fall Meeting | September 26

Amarillo Public Library, downtown | 9am–3pm

## District 3 Fall Meeting | November 30

Austin Public Library downtown | 9am–3pm

## District 4 Fall Meeting | November 10

Location pending

## District 5 Fall Meeting | October 18

Virtual | 2–5pm

## District 6 Fall Meeting | October 21

Socorro ISD, El Paso | 9am

## District 7 Fall Meeting | October 13

University of North Texas Willis Library | time TBD

## District 8 Fall Meeting | November 4

MD Anderson Library, University of Houston | 10am–5pm

## District 9 Fall Meeting | October 21

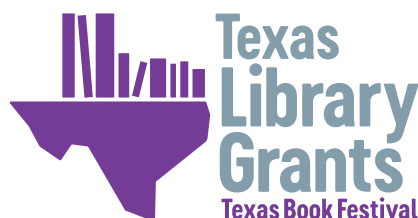
Centennial Elementary School, Lubbock | 9am–3pm

## District 10 Fall Meeting | October 20

Holocaust Memorial Museum of San Antonio | time TBD

# Texas Book Festival 2023 Grant Recipients

Congratulations to the recipients of this year's Texas Book Festival grants! A total of \$97,500 was awarded to 41 public libraries for collection development. The Texas Book Festival will open applications for 2024 grants in February.



Allen Memorial Public Library

Arlington Public Library

Balch Springs Library

Bastrop Public Library

Bedford Public Library

Benbrook Public Library

Bertram Library

Castroville Public Library

Chambers County Library System

Cleburne Public Library

Cooke County Library

Corsicana Public Library

East Travis Gateway Library District

Dickinson Public Library

Driscoll Public Library

Ector County Library

Fannie Brown Booth Memorial Library

Farmers Branch Manske Library

Henderson County Library

Valley Ranch Library

J.R. Huffman Public Library

Jarrell Community Library

Judy B. McDonald Public Library

Lillie Russell Memorial Library

Little Elm Public Library

Longview Public Library

Mesquite Public Library

Nueces County Keach Family Library

Pilot Point Community Library

Davis Library

Real County Public Library

Rio Grande City Public Library

Roberta Bourne Memorial Library

Robertson County Carnegie Library

Rusk County Library

Sachse Public Library

Sterling County Public Library

TLL Temple Memorial Library

W. Walworth Harrison Public Library

Whitehouse Community Library

Zula B. Wylie Public Library

# In Memoriam



Aldine ISD librarian and longtime TLA member **Elizabeth Meeker** passed away on August 14. Elizabeth was Program Director of Digital Library Services at Aldine ISD and previously an elementary school librarian. As a TLA member, she served on the disaster relief committee and the local arrangements committee and was a proud alumni of TALL Texans 2014. In her work as a librarian, she supported and lifted those around her. [Full obituary.](#)

## APPLY TO BE ON A TEXAS BLUEBONNET AWARD COMMITTEE!

If you have always wanted to be a member of one of the Texas Bluebonnet Award committees (Selection or Program) now is the time to apply. Application and letters of recommendation should be sent to [Kelly Mantay](#). Deadline is October 1. Questions should be directed to TBA Coordinator [Terri Harkey](#).

[Application here](#)

# Americans and the Holocaust Traveling Exhibition

## APPLICATIONS CLOSE OCTOBER 14, 2023

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) and the American Library Association (ALA) Public Programs Office present Americans and the Holocaust, a traveling exhibition that examines the motives, pressures and fears that shaped Americans' responses to Nazism, war and genocide in Europe during the 1930s and 1940s. Following a highly successful tour to [50 libraries](#) from 2021 to 2023, the exhibition will now be available to **50 additional public and academic (i.e., college and university) libraries** from 2024 to 2026.

Libraries in communities with a demonstrated interest in and need for quality Holocaust education are especially encouraged to apply. Read the [project guidelines](#) and [apply online](#) by October 14, 2023.

Selected libraries will receive:

- The 1,100-square-foot exhibition on loan for five to six weeks;
- A \$3,000 allowance to support public programs;
- Expenses paid for a library staff member to attend an orientation workshop (May 15-16, 2024) at the Museum in Washington, D.C.; and
- Publicity materials, programming resources, ongoing support from the Museum and the ALA, and more.

[Apply here!](#)

# Upcoming Events

**OCTOBER 16 | 3PM**

## TLA Talks: Connecting All Texans to the Internet

The Texas Broadband Development Office (BDO), located within the Comptroller of Public Accounts, is in the midst of a once-in-a-generation opportunity to connect all Texans to the Internet. Libraries are important partners in this work, both to provide direct service as well as to share the importance of internet and digital skills to stakeholders. In this webinar, attendees will learn what the Texas Broadband Office has been hearing from our public engagement tour and continued outreach, how libraries can get involved in provided feedback, and how libraries may leverage historic funding to provide universal access to the Internet.

Presenter: Cindy Fisher, Senior Broadband Development Coordinator

[Register here](#)

# TLA 2023 Corporate Sponsors

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## Legacy Partner

### **TOCKER FOUNDATION**

EDI Core Competency Program, Small Library  
Resource Center, Small Community Libraries Round  
Table Social, TLA Leadership Events

## President's Circle

### **CAPSTONE**

Conference Badges & Lanyards, TLA After Hours, Black  
Caucus Round Table Author Session

### **MACKIN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES**

Exhibit Hall Park Benches, School Administrators  
Conference, Teacher Day @ TLA, Texas Bluebonnet  
Award Author Session Travel Stipends, The Lawn, TLA  
Talks Webinar

## Platinum

### **BOUND TO STAY BOUND**

Texas Bluebonnet Award Author Session

### **EBSCO**

Annual Assembly & Officer Planning, TLA Leadership  
Events, TLA Learns

### **GALE, A CENGAGE COMPANY**

Annual Assembly & Officer Planning, Conference App,  
General Session II, School Administrators Conference,  
Teacher Day @ TLA

### **H-E-B READ 3**

Exhibits Grand Opening

## Silver

### **AUSTIN PUBLIC LIBRARY**

Black Caucus Round Table Events

### **MIDWEST TAPE / HOOPLA DIGITAL**

Evening with the Authors

### **SIMON & SCHUSTER CHILDREN'S PUBLISHING**

Texas Bluebonnet Award Author Session Tabletop Donor

### **ST. DAVID'S LIBRARIES FOR HEALTH**

General Session III

## Diamond

### **BRODART COMPANY**

Conference Information Center, General Session II,  
Member Grand Prize

### **JUNIOR LIBRARY GUILD/LIBRARY JOURNAL/ SCHOOL LIBRARY JOURNAL**

Aisle x Aisle Coupon Book, Authors Area, Celebrate  
Books with Letters About Literature Winners, JLG  
Diversity & Inclusion Conference Stipend

### **LIBRARY INTERIORS/ESTEY LIBRARY SHELVING**

Annual Assembly & Officer Planning, Black Caucus  
Round Table Author Session, Conference App, District 7  
Fall Meeting, Recharge Lounges

## Gold

### **BIBLIONIX**

Biblionix-Public Libraries Division Conference Stipend,  
Biblionix-Small Community Libraries Round Table  
Conference Stipend, Public Library Division Party, Small  
Community Libraries Round Table Social

### **PERMA-BOUND BOOKS**

2x2 Reading List & Session, Lone Star Reading List  
Session, TAYSHAS Reading List Session, Texas Star  
Reading List Session, Texas Topaz Reading List &  
Session





# SAVE THE DATE

STORIES INSPIRE  
OPPORTUNITIES AWAIT

TLA★2024

★ SAN ANTONIO ★

APRIL 16 – 19

REGISTRATION OPENS OCT. 2

[txla.org/annual-conference](https://txla.org/annual-conference)