

Full Interview

M = Alexandria Representative

A = high school librarian

L = elementary school librarian

M: In the States, November has a Children's Book Week and a Youth Reading Day, so we are doing blog posts on promoting reading and children's books.

So how do you inspire young readers to read? (Or, your readers, respectively.)

L: We have the Sakura Medal program, which is just starting now [for this year]. It's a program where there are certain books put aside—20 books in different categories—and there's a competition. And at the end of the time the girls will vote for the best one. So that is very exciting, they get very excited with that program.

M: Are there different books for the high school and elementary school?

L: Yes, there are 5 sections. 2 Japanese sections, 5 English sections. Graphic novel, chapter book, picture book, middle school, and high school. So there are quite a lot of books in that area. Then we make a little catalog [note] in Alexandria so that we can find them and access them quickly. We do get them on Overdrive as well.

L: I've found that on our actual website, putting up pictures of books—new books—seems to be inspirational. But kids just talk to other kids about books. It's actually way better. And making sure they can come in here [the library]. Kids are in here all the time.

M: How long is the library open?

L: 8am-4:30pm. (When they do classes those run 45 minutes.) They can come in anytime in the morning and anytime after school to check out books. And parents come in as well. And the online service, that's 24 hours.

M: (To A) Have you found the same thing for your kids?

A: It's just different in middle and high school. So the middle school classes come down, there's a reading class so they come down. Teachers get books regularly. But high school kids just come when they have time. I think they want to read when they have time. So I can tell when they have time because they will come in (certain kids). So if a weekend is coming up, or a holiday. So I think kids enjoy reading, in high school it's just finding the time to do it.

M: Do you have mostly fiction—I'm looking around and I see mostly fiction—or some of both fiction and non-fiction?

L: [Pointing] That's the non-fiction, the chapter book section, the picture book section, and graphic novel. We have a nice balance.

A: I think I probably have more fiction, because they are looking for more pleasure reading, to escape.

M: They are already studying a lot for their classes I'm sure.

A: I know the elementary school uses a lot [of books] of their units of inquiry.

L: Well for the lower level stuff—most kids will go to the internet for information. Just to have it at an easier level [in the library], is the advantage—and the pictures.

But they still prefer to go to the internet I have to say. If you give them a choice they go to the internet first. So it's a different world really. I would say most children come in here to pick fiction pleasure books. Unless the teachers check out all the books down here. You know, the library—you are here to support the teachers, as well as just the students. We just had 8 books on ancient civilizations taken out.

A: We also order books if they request it—students, teachers, or parents.

M: So if a teacher is teaching a certain section...

A: Or if they just want a book to read. We just had a workshop, and there are always books that are mentioned, so then you end up buying those books.

M: What are your go-to books to get students reading? Are there a specific few you start with?

L: Anything in a graphic novel, they'll take that. Then there's always the series, this year my goal is to make sure they know some series and authors, so we're really kind of pushing that. But a graphic novel really. Well and like Harry Potter, or Warriors, or anything by [Rick] Riordan, are a good go-to if anyone wants a series. And that seems to be quite good. So we get in lots of new series.

M: Are there a couple graphic novels off the top of your head?

L: Well anything by Raina Telgemeier, and Babysitter's Club, Baby Mouse, Dance Class—those are never in the library. But I would recommend the Sakura Medal books. I push those every year. Those are what I push that might bring in new authors, then we might get a whole lot of books by the same author.

A: And they only take the first book in a series, for that [the Sakura Medal], so that introduces them to a series.

M: Do you have a favorite among past winners of the Sakura Medal?

L: I'm busy reading this year's one at the moment, so last year's have all gone away [from mind] a little bit, but I mean there's quite a lot of picture books that I remember. Ida, Always won last year, it was so sad, everyone cries when they read it, I remember that one particularly.

It's ones I'm reading at the moment that spring mostly to mind!

Ms. Bixby's Last Day, I've enjoyed, it's a British novel. There are so many really. I'm enjoying Wish [Barbara O'Connor], I just finished that. The Explorer [Katherine Rundell?].

M: Can I find those listed online?

L: You can just google 'sakura medal' and there's a website.

[<https://sakuratest.weebly.com/2018-nominees.html>]

I would not recommend last year's winner, it was awful. And the only reason it won was because it was popular with the boys, and there were a lot of boys books. It was about zombies, and not a single girl at our school voted for it. So I wouldn't say I recommend you always read the winner. But Ida Always was a winner.

M: A, do you have any particular books you use/recommend?

A: No, it's really hard because kids like to read science fiction and fantasy, which I don't like, so I can't give them recommendations. I usually ask them to name some books they've read recently, then I can kind of help them figure it out. I always feel like that level is a bit more personal in some ways, like they get fixated on what they want to read. Usually I have them talk with their friends to figure it out. And there are actually a lot of girls who want to help their friends find books.

L: It really seems to be word of mouth. They're in here talking about books, they'll take more interesting in what their friend says. I mean, I can show books and do book talks, but sometimes if nobody picks it up, nobody... but if one person picks it up, it kind of goes around.

A: And then if they can't check it out for a while, it makes it even more interesting.

M: Do you allow them to place holds?

L: Yes. The system does well with that, they can do 2 holds. We have a 'new books' section, the books are new and they aren't allowed to take those books out. And they fill in a list. So there are 5 names that can go on the list, the first person will get the book when it comes up for that section. And that is quite exciting. Sometimes I think they just want to write their name, to get the book first. There's a book up there now, it's 'Dog Man, Lord of the Fleas', and I put 5 sections, the girls have gone down and added 20 names. They've just done that themselves. 'We don't care that Miss L only wants 5, we're just going to keep writing'. So I've ordered another 2 copies, because it's obviously that popular. I just smiled. Usually they know. But no, they just kept writing.

M: Just in case!

L: That's right. The fact that you're number 20 on the list doesn't seem to make anybody care. But it's good, because I know I have to order more.

M: What is the most popular children's book at your school?

L: Any graphic novel. Smile or Drama or Sisters, I couldn't pick between them, or Dance Class. So Raina Telgemeier, or Babysitters or Dance Class. And it wouldn't be just one book. I mean, Harry Potter is popular, but those books [that I've just mentioned] are just checked out every day. The Warriors are very popular, the cat books, they go through a quick phase, but probably nothing like Raina Telgemeier. If she turned up here they'd worship her I suppose.

M: She should!

L: I know, I've asked her, I've written on her website and never had a reply. She probably doesn't need to. Perhaps she's a very quiet person, who doesn't want to travel to Japan.

M: A, what about your division?

A: No, I don't think there's any one book. At this point, I think it depends, there are so many different reading levels and grade levels, that it's hard to... it's different when they are younger, because they tend to want to do whatever everyone else thinks is popular. There [in my division] they've figured out what they like, usually, and plus especially with our English language development program, kids know their reading level, so they try to find books at their level. The kids scrutinize what they are looking for, carefully.

M: Do you use a reading level program to rate the books?

A: Just Lexile scores. We put it in the system as well. Then the kids can find it.

M: Do you put stickers on the book?

A: We physically write it on the first page, but also we put it in the main catalog, so it will show up, or they can Researcher it.

L: I don't, but I've noticed that you [A] do so that's great. But it's available for teachers, so they can see through Alexandria. I prefer kids to come in here and not be reading at a level. Because it's all level in their classrooms, so when they come in here they can go easy, they can go hard. Here, you be a risk taker, you take what you want. I'm not going to say 'no you can't have it'—I mean, obviously, if it's something, you know.. we might look at it, we might say 'do you want to read it, do you really like it?' you know, and sometimes they go 'no, I don't actually'. I try not to, I dissuade anybody who comes in here and says 'can you please find me a book at level M?' I go 'No'. Let's find a book that you might like.

M: Do the kids ever cross libraries?

L: At grade 6... we have grade 6 here, and they are going to be coming up to Sakura Medal soon, next week, and after this month... Grade 6's can ask me for any book that's up there and I'll get it, but we don't just let them go in there, because that's not their school. They are in elementary school. But after Christmas, they can go up and get the middle books. High school comes down here a lot though, the ELA teachers will bring kids down, come and check out books for them, so they might come in that way—usually with a teacher, I can't say that I've had a [high school] student come by themselves. They would come in with their ELA teacher.

M: Those are all the questions I have, do you have any questions about the software?

L: No, I mean it seems very, a lot of responses quite well whenever we have a problem. It does what we need it to do. I mean when you look at some of the newer ones the look of it is a bit static. Some of the other are very whizzy, but then you pay for that. That's the only thing. It works for everything I need it to do, and I know there are things it can do I don't know what they are. It works, it meets the needs of our library.

M: Have you considered moving to version 7?

L: Well, we like it to be housed in school. We never talked about moving to another version.
[Ann-Marie was the previous librarian.]

[Further discussion on version 7]