



2026 Fay B. Kaigler

# CHILDREN'S BOOK FESTIVAL

*Presented by the  
School of Library and  
Information Science*

**April 8-10**

The University of Southern Mississippi

# MEDALLION

The University of Southern Mississippi Medallion is a highlight of the Children's Book Festival. Awarded annually for outstanding contributions in the field of children's literature, the Medallion for 2026 goes to Meg Medina. Silver medallions are cast for the recipient, while nickel medallions are available for purchase during the festival.



## Recipients of The University of Southern Mississippi Medallion

- |                                    |                                 |                                     |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <b>1969</b> Lois Lenski            | <b>1988</b> Jean Fritz          | <b>2007</b> Eve Bunting             |
| <b>1970</b> Ernest H. Shepard      | <b>1989</b> Lee Bennett Hopkins | <b>2008</b> Pat Mora                |
| <b>1971</b> Roger Duvoisin         | <b>1990</b> Charlotte Zolotow   | <b>2009</b> Judy Blume              |
| <b>1972</b> Marcia Brown           | <b>1991</b> Richard Peck        | <b>2010</b> David Wiesner           |
| <b>1973</b> Lynd Ward              | <b>1992</b> James Marshall      | <b>2011</b> T.A. Barron             |
| <b>1974</b> Taro Yashima           | <b>1993</b> Quentin Blake       | <b>2012</b> Jane Yolen              |
| <b>1975</b> Barbara Cooney         | <b>1994</b> Ashley Bryan        | <b>2013</b> Jon Scieszka            |
| <b>1976</b> Scott O'Dell           | <b>1995</b> Tomie de Paola      | <b>2014</b> Christopher Paul Curtis |
| <b>1977</b> Adrienne Adams         | <b>1996</b> Patricia MacLachlan | <b>2015</b> Paul O. Zelinsky        |
| <b>1978</b> Madeleine L'Engle      | <b>1997</b> Eric Carle          | <b>2016</b> Jacqueline Woodson      |
| <b>1979</b> Leonard Everett Fisher | <b>1998</b> Elaine Konigsburg   | <b>2017</b> Kate DiCamillo          |
| <b>1980</b> Ezra Jack Keats        | <b>1999</b> Russell Freedman    | <b>2018</b> Dav Pilkey              |
| <b>1981</b> Maurice Sendak         | <b>2000</b> David Macaulay      | <b>2019</b> Tamora Pierce           |
| <b>1982</b> Beverly Cleary         | <b>2001</b> Virginia Hamilton   | <b>2020</b> Rita Williams-Garcia    |
| <b>1983</b> Katherine Paterson     | <b>2002</b> Rosemary Wells      | <b>2021</b> Andrea Davis Pinkney    |
| <b>1984</b> Peter Spier            | <b>2003</b> Lois Lowry          | <b>2022</b> Brian Selznick          |
| <b>1985</b> Arnold Lobel           | <b>2004</b> Jerry Pinkney       | <b>2023</b> Gene Luen Yang          |
| <b>1986</b> Jean Craighead George  | <b>2005</b> Kevin Henkes        | <b>2024</b> Cynthia Leitich Smith   |
| <b>1987</b> Paula Fox              | <b>2006</b> Walter Dean Myers   | <b>2025</b> LeUyen Pham             |

# MEG MEDINA

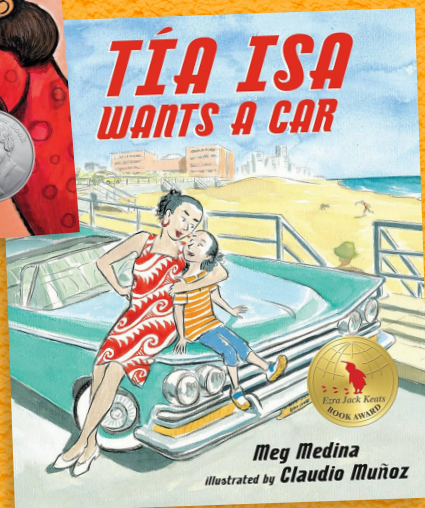
## 2026 Southern Miss Medallion Recipient



The 2026 Southern Miss Medallion winner is **Meg Medina**, a celebrated Cuban American author who has penned books for readers of all ages. She served as the 2023-24 National Ambassador for Young People's Literature, and her work has been awarded many accolades, including a Newbery Medal (for *Merci Suárez Changes Gears*), a Pura Belpré Author Award Honor (*Mango, Abuela and Me*), a Charlotte Zolotow Award (*Evelyn Del Rey Is Moving Away*), a Cybils Award (*Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass*) and an Ezra Jack Keats New Writer Award (*Tía Isa Wants a Car*). *Burn Baby Burn* was longlisted for a National Book Award in 2016. All awards accounted for, Medina also uses her voice to advocate for and educate others.

Some of that work can be seen in anthologies Medina has taken part in. For example, *The Talk: Conversations About Race, Love and Truth* helps parents navigate difficult, but important, conversations with their children. *You Can't Say That!* discusses censorship in books for young people and advocates for adults to trust readers with sensitive issues. Most importantly, Medina emphasizes that *all* readers should be represented in children's literature, treated with respect and care, and celebrated. Medina's work is simultaneously specific to her experiences as a Cuban American woman and universal. She captures the often confusing, awkward, exciting and beautiful stage of young adulthood wonderfully.

Medina's latest book, *Graciela in the Abyss*, is her first fantasy novel. When she's not busy working on her next book, Meg Medina gets involved with community projects that support girls, Latino youth and literacy. She lives with her family in Richmond, Virginia. We're thrilled to celebrate Medina's work - past and future - at this year's Kaigler Children's Book Festival!



## 2026 Keynote Speakers



Despite some claims that **Ben Clanton** is part unicorn/part dragon, we're pretty sure he's mostly human. Clanton's bestselling *Narwhal and Jelly* series has delighted young readers for 10 years in many different forms - graphic novels, picture books, board books and delightful plush toys! The series celebrates imagination and friendship between the somewhat mismatched Narwhal and his friend Jelly, a jellyfish (of course). He has also written and illustrated *Tater Tales*, a trilogy of books following the mutant potato siblings Rot, Snot and Tot, through a series of "spud-tacular" adventures. Clanton has additionally written and illustrated several standalone books, like *Mo's Mustache*, *Vote for Me!*, *Rex Wrecks It* and *It Came in the Mail*. He has also worked on *Ploof* and *Paint with Ploof* with Andy Chou Musser, *Aquamanatee* with Cassandra Federman and DC Comics, and *Papilio* with Corey R. Tabor and Andy Chou Musser.

Clanton's work captures the joy and creativity of childhood, with magic for readers of all ages.

**Lee Knox Ostertag** is an award-winning graphic novelist and television animation writer. Ostertag originally started sharing his work online with the webcomic, *Strong Female Protagonist* (with Brennan Lee Mulligan), but he then moved on to write and illustrate his own graphic novels, *The Witch Boy*, *The Girl from the Sea* and *The Deep Dark*. He has also written the *Dungeon Club* series (illustrated by Xanthe Bouma) and penned several fan works, which can be found in his Substack, *In the Telling*. Ostertag's television work includes the Peabody award-winning episode, "Enchanting Grom Fright," for *The Owl House*.



Ostertag earned a 2018 Ignatz Award for Outstanding Story for his comic, "How the Best Hunter in the Village Met Her Death," and was named in Forbes' "30 Under 30" 2021 list. In addition to his graphic novel and animation work, Ostertag has also written for the Dungeons and Dragons module, *Von Richten's Guide to Ravenloft*, and appeared on the tabletop roleplaying web series, *Critical Role*.

Ostertag's work captures the often-tumultuous identity building that many experience during young adulthood and offers a hopeful vision of what can happen when people prioritize inclusivity and community.



**Don Tate** is an award-winning author and illustrator of numerous critically acclaimed books for children. He began his career in the publishing business before settling firmly into the author/illustrator side of children's books, and since then, he's worked on both fiction and nonfiction picture books - often telling the stories of underrepresented historical figures. Tate advocates for literature that represents all young people, and his books include stories about artist Bill Traylor, poet George Moses Horton and abolitionist William Still, among others. In 2016, *Poet: The Remarkable Story of George Moses Horton* won an Ezra Jack Keats New Writer Award.

Tate's work takes him to school visits, libraries and beyond. He's one of the founders of The Brown Bookshelf, a blog dedicated to bringing awareness to Black authors and illustrators creating for young readers through its 28 Days Later initiative. Tate's work is full of optimism and resilience, with expressive illustrations and writing that bring stories to life. The next few years will be busy for Tate, with upcoming books like *Black in the Pool: The History of African Americans and Swimming* (Charlesbridge, 2027) and *Let Them Fly!* (Lerner, 2026).

# Coleen Salley Storytelling Award Recipient



**Molly Idle** is the author and illustrator of the Caldecott Honor-winning picture book, *Flora and the Flamingo* (as well as the entire *Flora* series). She's also the creator of the *Rex* series (which includes *Tea Rex* and *Sea Rex*), the mermaid tales *Pearl* and *Coral*, and most recently, *Witch Hazel*.

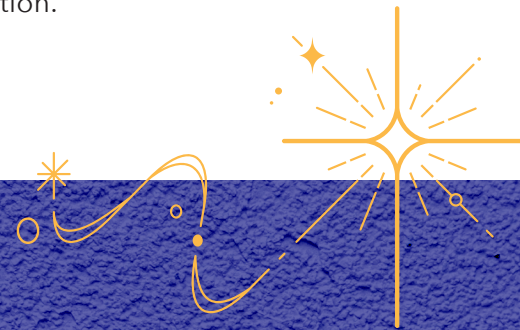
After earning a BFA in drawing, Idle worked as an artist for DreamWorks Feature Animation studios in California. She later moved to Arizona, where she lives with her wonderful family and creates bright, charming and magical picture books. In an interview with *The Children's Book Review*, Idle explained that she's always been drawn to stories. "They're just what our entire lives are made of," she said. "To me, to share your story is to share your life. To hear somebody else's story is to have them share theirs with you and become a part of it simultaneously. I think the sharing of stories is integral." One of Idle's most recent books, *Witch Hazel*, encapsulates the power of storytelling, taking readers on a journey through the life of Hazel, from her sweet childhood memories to her aging adult years.

In August 2026, *Off the Wall: Making Stuff Together*, a collaboration between Idle and former Coleen Salley Storytelling Award winner, Juana Martinez-Neal, will be published by Neal Porter Books.

## The Coleen Salley Storytelling Award



The Coleen Salley Storytelling Award was established to honor the memory of Children's Book Festival supporter, storyteller and children's literature advocate, Coleen Salley. Throughout her career and life, Ms. Salley worked tirelessly to promote quality children's literature. Each year, the award recognizes a storyteller whose mission reflects the ideals and dedication to the field that Ms. Salley personified. This session is supported by the family of Coleen Salley, the Coleen Salley Storytelling Endowment, and The University of Southern Mississippi Foundation.



## Previous Coleen Salley Storytelling Award Winners

**2010** Walter Mayes AKA Walter the Giant Storyteller

**2011** Carmen Agra Deedy

**2012** Caroline Herring

**2013** Trout Fishing in America

**2014** Mary Hamilton

**2015** Rita Auerbach

**2016** Tim Tingle

**2017** Pat Mora

**2018** Wanda Johnson

**2019** William Joyce

**2020** Michael Fry

**2021** Elizabeth Ellis

**2022** Donna Washington

**2023** Amy Bruton Bluemel

**2024** Juana Martinez-Neal

**2025** Jos Holman

# Southern Miss School of Library and Information Science (SLIS) Lecture

In 2021, the Dr. Teresa S. Welsh Children's Book Festival Lecture Endowment provided continued support for a scholarly keynote at the Kaigler Festival. This scholarly lecture series carries on the proud tradition that was originally established by the Ezra Jack Keats Foundation in 1985.

## Southern Miss SLIS Lecturer



**Amanda Jones** is currently the school librarian at the same school she attended as a child, where she has worked for the past 23 years. Jones made national headlines in 2022, when she was targeted by extremists in her town for speaking out at a public library board meeting. She decided to fight back and took her harassers to court, while continuing to speak out at both the local and national level against the pro-censorship

movement. She has shared her experiences in *That Librarian: Fighting Book Banners in Today's America*.

Jones was the 2021 *School Library Journal* Co-Librarian of the Year, a 2021 *Library Journal* Mover and Shaker, and the 2020 Louisiana Librarian of the Year. She enjoys presenting at the national and international level on the importance of certified school librarians, book joy, and why every child deserves to see themselves reflected in the books on library shelves. Amanda has received numerous intellectual freedom awards from the American Library Association, American Association of School Librarians, and Louisiana Library Association for her dedication to eradicating censorship and promoting libraries in Louisiana.

She is the executive director of the Livingston Parish Library Alliance, a group comprised of citizens in her town dedicated to the importance of preserving the freedom of the library to provide services to all patrons no matter their ethnicity, religion, gender identity, education status, political affiliation, socioeconomic status, or any other diversity of life and thought. She is also a co-founding member of Louisiana Citizens Against Censorship, a grassroots organization fighting censorship in the bayou state. Amanda currently resides in Louisiana with her teenage daughter, husband she's known since first grade, and their cat, Juno Mars. When not presenting and fighting the good fight, Amanda enjoys reading, obsessively watching TikTok, and a good Louisiana crawfish boil.

## Previous Southern Miss SLIS Lecturers

**1985** Brian Alderson

**1987** Betsy Hearne

**1988** Nancy Hands

**1989** Ellin Greene

**1990** Michael Patrick Hearn

**1991** Dorothy Butler

**1992** Ann Thwaite

**1993** Anita Moss

**1994** Anita Silvey

**1995** Selma Lanes

**1996** Leonard Marcus

**1997** Ann Lundin

**1998** Roger Sutton

**1999** Susan Hirschman

**2000** Richard Peck

**2001** Patsy Perritt

**2002** Barbara Elleman

**2003** Eliza Dresang

**2004** Eric Kimmel

**2005** E.B. Lewis

**2006** Floyd Dickman

**2007** Leonard Marcus

**2008** Barbara Immroth

**2009** Pat Scales

**2011** Roger Sutton

**2012** Anita Silvey

**2013** K.T. Horning

**2014** Karen Nelson Hoyle

**2015** Rita Auerbach

**2016** Michael Cart

**2017** Andrea Davis Pinkney

**2018** Charlotte Jones Voiklis

**2019** Bweela Steptoe

**2020** Randy Testa

**2021** Meg Medina

**2022** Eric Tribunella

**2024** Liz Kleinrock

**2025** Jamie C. Naidoo

## de Grummond Children's Literature Lecturer



**John Green** is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Looking for Alaska*, *An Abundance of Katherines*, *Paper Towns*, *The Fault in Our Stars*, *Turtles All the Way Down*, *The Anthropocene Reviewed* and *Everything Is Tuberculosis*. He is also the co-author, with David Levithan, of *Will Grayson, Will Grayson*. He was the 2006 recipient of the Michael L. Printz Award, a 2009 Edgar Award winner, and has twice been a finalist for the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize. Green's books have been published in more than 55 languages, and over 24 million copies are in print.

You might also know Green from his work with his brother Hank, including several educational projects, like *Crash Course* and *Sci Show*, as well as podcasts, like *Dear Hank and John* and *The Anthropocene Reviewed*, which eventually became a book.

John grew up in Orlando, Florida, before attending Indian Springs School and then Kenyon College. He currently lives in Indianapolis with his family.

## The de Grummond Children's Literature Collection

Founded in 1966 by Dr. Lena de Grummond, the de Grummond Children's Literature Collection is the result of one woman's dream to collect original materials from authors and illustrators of children's books to use as resources for students in library science. Today, the collection has grown far beyond its original intent and is now one of the largest such collections in North America.

While the collection has many strengths, it mainly focuses on American and British children's literature, historical as well as contemporary, and it holds original materials and published works in the McCain Library and Archives on the Hattiesburg campus of The University of Southern Mississippi.

The de Grummond Collection contains works from more than 1,400 authors and illustrators, including Randolph Caldecott, John Newbery, Kate Greenaway, H.A. and Margret Rey, and Ezra Jack Keats. These are some of the most celebrated names in children's literature, with Caldecott, Newbery and Greenaway all having prestigious national awards named in their honor, and the Reys being the creators of *Curious George*.

Keats, the man behind *The Snowy Day*, is one of America's most groundbreaking authors because of his efforts to break the color barrier in children's publishing. *The Snowy Day* is considered to be one of the most important American books of the 20th century. The de Grummond Collection is the sole repository of the works of Ezra Jack Keats, holding original artwork, typescripts, dummies and preliminary sketches for 35 books by the Caldecott Award-winning author/illustrator that complement the archives of his personal and professional papers.

For more information, contact

**Karlie Herndon**, Curator, de Grummond Children's Literature Collection  
McCain Library and Archives  
The University of Southern Mississippi  
118 College Drive #5148  
Hattiesburg, MS 39406  
601.266.4349

### Previous de Grummond Lecturers

- 2010 Richard Peck
- 2011 Gary Schmidt
- 2012 Margery Cuyler
- 2013 Wendell Minor
- 2014 Kathi Appelt
- 2015 Deborah Wiles
- 2016 Tim Tingle
- 2017 Phyllis Reynolds Naylor
- 2018 T.A. Barron
- 2019 Sophie Blackall
- 2020 Emma Walton Hamilton
- 2021 Sharon Draper
- 2022 Lesa Cline-Ransome and James Ransome
- 2023 Loren Long
- 2024 Jason Chin
- 2025 Will Hillenbrand

# 2026 EZRA JACK KEATS AWARD

The Ezra Jack Keats (EJK) Foundation, in partnership with the de Grummond Children's Literature Collection at The University of Southern Mississippi, will present the winners of the 2026 Ezra Jack Keats Award, along with four honor books, at the award ceremony on April 9, 2026, during the Fay B. Kaigler Children's Book Festival in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. The annual EJK Award celebrates exceptional early career authors and illustrators for portraying the multicultural nature of our world in the spirit of Ezra Jack Keats.

"This year's EJK Award winning and honor books provide inclusive stories about children who live in New York City and in the mountains of Peru, children dealing with loss of home and heritage, and children in need of support as they search for their true identity," said Deborah Pope, executive director of the EJK Foundation, "EJK Award books entertain while opening children's minds and hearts. This year is no exception."

Karlie Herndon, curator of the de Grummond Children's Literature Collection and the Ezra Jack Keats Papers at The University of Southern Mississippi, said, "After 40 years, the EJK Award continues to uplift new creators who capture the essence of a Keatsian world: one where community and family shine, where curiosity is the best teacher, and where kindness and empathy can change the world. I'm so proud to be on the sidelines, cheering this new cohort of EJK winner and honor books into the good company this award has fostered for four decades."

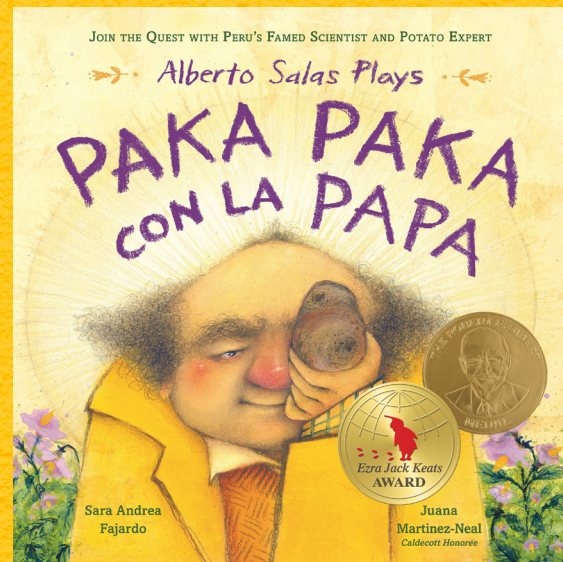
Since its inception, the EJK Award has celebrated over 100 exceptional early career authors and illustrators for portraying the multicultural nature of our world, the universal experience of childhood, and the importance of family and community. Past winners include renowned bookmakers Oge Mora, Meg Medina, Christian Robinson, Bryan Collier and Sophie Blackall.





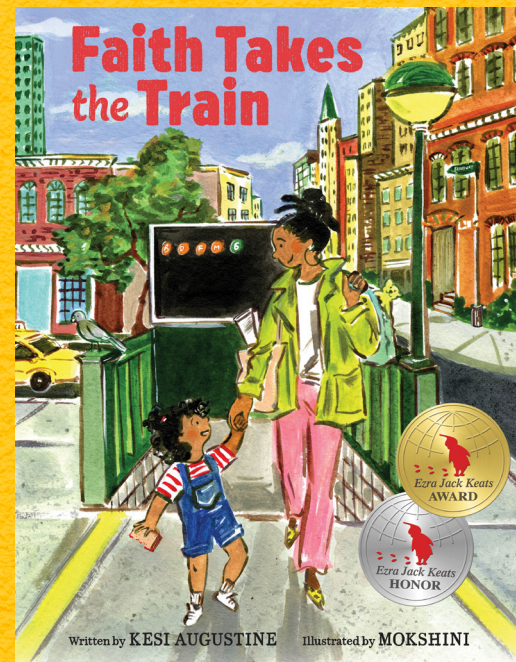
# EZRA JACK KEATS AWARD RECIPIENTS

## Ezra Jack Keats Award Winner for Writer



**Sara Andrea Fajardo**  
*Alberto Salas Plays Paka Paka con la Papa*  
Illustrated by Juana Martinez-Neal  
Published by Roaring Brook Press

## Ezra Jack Keats Award Winner for Illustrator

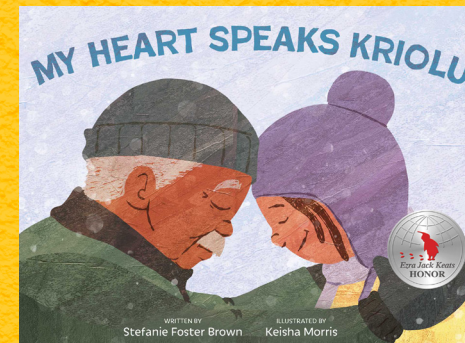


**Mokshini**  
*Faith Takes the Train*  
Written by Kesi Augustine  
Published by Harper/Harper Collins Publishers

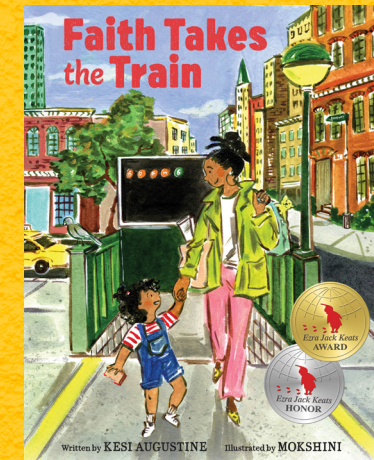


# EZRA JACK KEATS AWARD HONOR RECIPIENTS

## Writer Honors

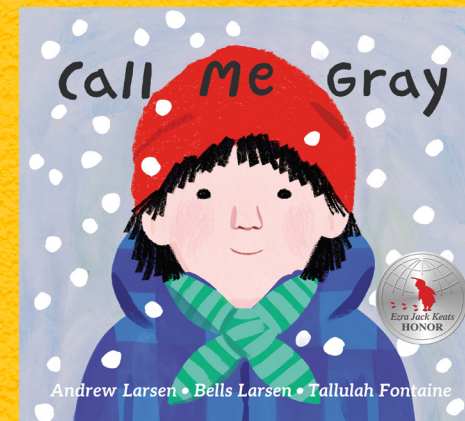


**Stefanie Foster Brown**  
*My Heart Speaks Kriolu*  
Illustrated by Keisha Morris  
Published by Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing

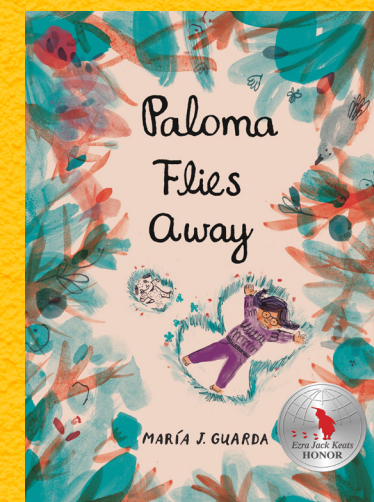


**Kesi Augustine**  
*Faith Takes the Train*  
Illustrated by Mokshini  
Published by Harper/Harper Collins Publishers

## Illustrator Honors



**Tallulah Fontaine**  
*Call Me Gray*  
Written by Andrew Larsen and Bells Larsen  
Published by Kids Can Press



**María J. Guarda**  
*Paloma Flies Away*  
Written by María J. Guarda  
Published by Candlewick Press

The Ezra Jack Keats Award is co-administered by the EJK Foundation and the de Grummond Children's Literature Collection at The University of Southern Mississippi. A distinguished selection committee of children's literature and early childhood education specialists, librarians, authors and illustrators review the entries and announce the winners and honorees on the second Tuesday in March each year.

Ezra Jack Keats (1916-83) is considered one of America's greatest children's book illustrators and authors. His first book, *The Snowy Day*, which he wrote and illustrated, was published in 1962. It was awarded the Caldecott Medal, the most prestigious children's book award for illustration in the United States, in 1963. Keats went on to write and illustrate over 20 now-classic books, including *Peter's Chair*, *Whistle for Willie* and *A Letter to Amy*. He wanted no child to be an outsider. "If we could see each other exactly as the other is," he wrote. "This would be a different world."

# The Fay B. Kaigler-Ruth Lamont Award

1998 marked the first presentation of the Kaigler-Lamont Award. The generous financial support of Fay Kaigler of McComb, Miss., made the award possible. Miss Kaigler was well-known for her love of children and, as an elementary teacher, devoted herself for many years to enhancing books and reading in the lives of children. Her students were soon hooked on books. In retirement, she continued to promote books and reading in her local public library. Her dear friend, Ruth Lamont, who for many years was a successful school librarian in Baton Rouge, La., shared her passion for making books integral to children's lives.

The Kaigler-Lamont Award recognizes distinguished accomplishments in promoting children's reading by librarians and teachers in Mississippi schools, and by children's librarians in the public libraries of Mississippi.

This year's recipient is **Wendy Daughdrill**.

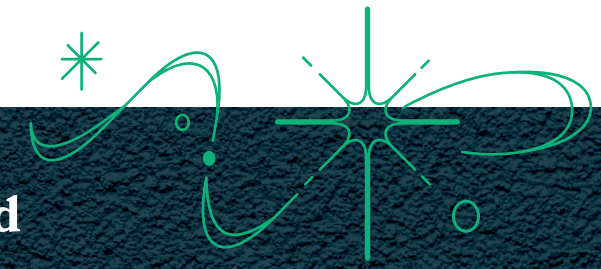
## Past Recipients of the Kaigler-Lamont Award

<b>1998</b> Mattie Rials	<b>2013</b> Elizabeth Turner
<b>1999</b> Lawana Cummings and Charjean Graves	<b>2014</b> Tracey H. Crawford
<b>2000</b> Sybil Hanna	<b>2015</b> Kathie Ward
<b>2001</b> Sherry Donald	<b>2016</b> Becky Smith
<b>2002</b> Linda E. Sikes	<b>2017</b> Nettie Moore
<b>2003</b> Gerrie Ann Weldon	<b>2018</b> Venetia Oglesby
<b>2004</b> Vickie Ross	<b>2019</b> Jennifer Baker
<b>2005</b> Victoria Penny	<b>2020</b> Beckie Nieman
<b>2006</b> Carol Phares	<b>2021</b> Connie Robinson and Loraine Walker
<b>2007</b> Ramona Barrett	<b>2022</b> Otha Keys
<b>2008</b> Sally James	<b>2023</b> Becky Bowen
<b>2009</b> Linda Perez	<b>2024</b> MacAllister Jackson
<b>2011</b> Faye Harris Bruce	<b>2025</b> Leah Rials
<b>2012</b> Dianne Butler	

# Giverny Award for the Best Children's Science Picture Book



The Giverny Award is awarded annually to the best children's science picture book that serves our youngest readers, ages 4-8. Each year, the 15<sup>th</sup> Laboratory chooses one science picture book, published in the English language in the previous five years, that teaches young readers at least one important scientific principle or promotes science-related attitudes, pursuits or inquiries. Artwork, illustrations and graphics must work in harmony with the story's text, and hence, both the author and illustrator receive the award. The award's name alludes to the renowned French village that provided the setting and inspiration for Monet's famous impressionist paintings. Molly Bang, the first Giverny Award recipient, designed the award's seal.



## Past Recipients of the Giverny Award

<b>1998</b> <i>Common Ground</i> , Molly Bang	<b>2008</b> <i>The Prince of Butterflies</i> , Bruce Covile and John Clapp	<b>2018</b> <i>Bat Count</i> , Anna Forrester and Susan Detwiler
<b>1999</b> <i>Sam Plants a Sunflower</i> , Kate Petty and Axel Scheffler	<b>2009</b> <i>Forest Bright/Forest Night</i> , Jennifer Ward and Jamichael Henterly	<b>2019</b> <i>Counting on Katherine</i> , Helaine Becker and Dow Phumiruk
<b>2000</b> <i>A Log's Life</i> , Wendy Pfeffer and Robin Brickman	<b>2010</b> <i>Redwoods</i> , Jason Chin	<b>2020</b> <i>They All Saw a Cat</i> , Brendan Wenzel
<b>2001</b> <i>Henry Hikes to Fitchburg</i> , D.B. Johnson	<b>2011</b> <i>A Tree for Emmy</i> , Mary Ann Rodman and Tatjana Mai-Wyss	<b>2021</b> <i>Little Turtle and the Changing Sea</i> , Becky Davies and Jennie Poh
<b>2002</b> <i>Rare Treasure</i> , Don Brown	<b>2012</b> <i>Eliza's Cherry Trees</i> , Andrea Zimmerman and Ju-Hong Chen	<b>2022</b> <i>Old Rock</i> , Deb Pilutti
<b>2003</b> <i>The Hidden Forest</i> , Jeannie Baker	<b>2013</b> <i>Green</i> , Laura Vaccaro Seeger	<b>2023</b> <i>The River That Wolves Moved</i> , Mary Kay Carson and David Hohn
<b>2004</b> <i>Lonesome George The Giant Tortoise</i> , Francine Jacobs and Jean Cassels	<b>2014</b> <i>Maple</i> , Lori Nichols	<b>2024</b> <i>Little Tree and the Wood Wide Web</i> , Lucy Brownridge and Hannah Abbo
<b>2005</b> <i>Squirrel and John Muir</i> , Emily Arnold McCully	<b>2015</b> <i>Up in the Garden, Down in the Dirt</i> , Kate Messner and Christopher Silas Neal	<b>2025</b> <i>The World's Best Class Plant</i> , Liz Garton Scanlon and Audrey Vernick, and illustrator Lynnor Bontigao
<b>2006</b> <i>Daniel and His Walking Stick</i> , Wendy McCormick and Constance Rummel Bergum	<b>2016</b> <i>Frog in the House</i> , David Mather and Stephanie Mirocha	
<b>2007</b> <i>The Snail and the Whale</i> , Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler	<b>2017</b> <i>The Tree Lady</i> , H. Joseph Hopkins and Jill McElmurry	

# The Magnolia Children's Choice Award



The Magnolia Children's Choice Award introduces youth to current literature with a goal of instilling a love of reading. The award was established in 2010 and is a partnership between the Mississippi Department of Education, the Mississippi Library Commission, the Mississippi Reading Association, The University of Southern Mississippi's School of Library and Information Science, the de Grummond Children's Literature Collection, the Mississippi Children's Museum and the Mississippi Library Association.

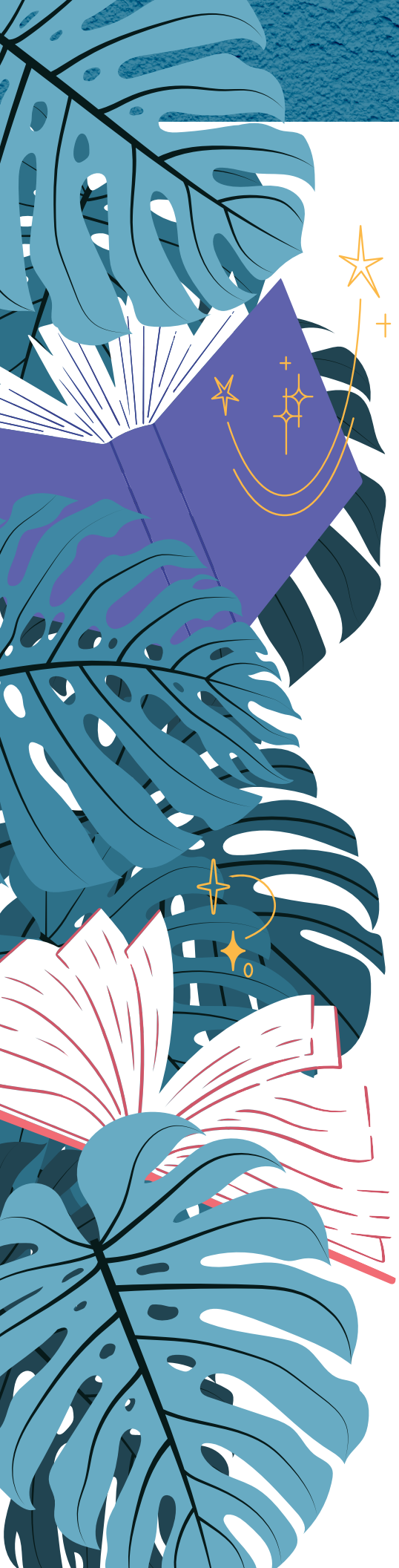
Votes can be cast by Mississippi children in grades K-12. Children in public, private or homeschooled settings are

eligible to vote. To be eligible to make the reading list (and ultimately be selected by the children as the winner), books must have been published within the past two years. Titles that have won a national award (i.e. Caldecott, Newbery, Sibert, Coretta Scott King, Pura Belprè, National Book Award, etc.) are not eligible for the Magnolia Award, but honor books are, and either the author or illustrator must be living. Nominations may be done by the public and by committees, but final selection of the titles is determined by the committee.

The winning titles in each category are announced at the Fay B. Kaigler Children's Book Festival.

For more information: [aquila.usm.edu/magnolia\\_book\\_awards](http://aquila.usm.edu/magnolia_book_awards)





## 2026 Concurrent Session Presenters

**Lauren Adams** is the youth specialist at the Hernando Public Library in Hernando, Miss. Lauren has worked in libraries for the past three years and hopes to continue to grow in librarianship for the rest of her career. Lauren's favorite parts of being a youth specialist are getting to lead story times and plan library programs for children and teenagers. She loves hanging out with her cat (Goose), reading, and going on walks.

**Pat Austin**, professor emerita of children's literature at the University of New Orleans, nurtured many teachers and librarians over many years. A former elementary teacher, author of more than 40 articles in educational journals, hundreds of book reviews, two children's books, and a teaching memoir, she is a passionate advocate for children's literature and for connecting people and books.

**Erica Brady** is youth specialist at the Lafayette County and Oxford Public Library, a branch of First Regional Library, and previously served as library assistant for two years. Erica is in her first year of The University of Southern Mississippi's Master of Library and Information Science program. She enjoys using puppets in her story times and has recently begun performing in puppet shows with Nancy.

**Ramona Caponegro** is a professor in the School of Library and Information Studies at the University of Alabama, where she specializes in youth literature and services. She serves as chair of the 2026 Newbery Award Committee. She was also a member of the 2023 Caldecott Award Committee and chair of the 2019 Pura Belpré Award Committee. When not serving on award committees, she writes about awards, representation in children's literature, and the history of children's books.

**John Cavalier**, alongside his wife **Michelle**, owns and operates Cavalier House Books. John mostly operates the business side of things, but he has a hand in everything that goes on. Michelle is the store's primary buyer, and she knows their shelves like the back of her hand. While John would rather read a book about the science of sound than a *New York Times* bestseller any day, Michelle hates Hemingway, loves Bukowski, and generally prefers a book in which bad things happen.

**Wendy Daughdrill** currently serves as president of the Magnolia Book Awards Executive Board. Wendy is the school librarian at Oxford Intermediate School. Before coming to the Oxford School District 15 years ago, she taught middle and high school English and has also worked with children and youth in the public library system. She thinks spending every day with kids and books is the best job in the world.

**Ginger Davis** is in her ninth year as a pre-K teacher for Lawrence County Schools in northwest Alabama. After years of resisting her true calling to teach young children, Ginger went back to school to earn a B.S. in elementary education from Athens State University and additional certification in early childhood. Her presentation style has been described as unique, quirky and hands-on.

**Kandice Evans** serves as the Children's Services supervisor at the Laurel-Jones County Library System. A lifelong resident of Laurel, Miss., and a mother to five, she brings both personal and professional experience to her role. Kandice has a strong background in children's literacy and programming, and she feels fortunate to work as a paraprofessional in the very library she grew up visiting. Over the past 10 years at the Laurel Library, she has found great joy in supporting and witnessing the growth of her community.

**Crystal Giles** has been in education for 25 years as an English teacher and librarian. She lives in Lake Serene with her husband, Bryan, an assistant principal; her children, Tyson and KatieAnn; and her sweet puppies, Nola and Roux. Crystal Giles loves reading, football and teaching.

**Ethan Glenn** is a 2023 graduate of the Southern Miss School of Library and Information Science master's program. He has been with the Laurel-Jones County Library for five years and lives in Petal with his fiancé. He is the trolley manager of L.O.T.T.I.E. the Library Trolley and has enjoyed thinking of outside-the-box ways of bringing the library to the community, such as working with his county schools to put library cards into the hands of every student. One of the highlights he enjoys from the Kaigler Festival is learning from other librarians—the method to the madness—because “we are all mad here,” and even though there is no cure for the madness, we may as well have a cup of tea or coffee, as he prefers, while running very, very late for that very important date.

**Jo Hackl** is a first-generation college graduate from rural Mississippi, an award-winning attorney, and the author of the national bestselling *Smack Dab in the Middle of Maybe* (Random House Children's Books/ Yearling Adventure), which won the Southern Book Prize. She is an Amazon Teacher's Pick and was selected by Read Across America to represent the state of Mississippi. Jo is a sought-out speaker and has presented at conferences, including those hosted by the American Library Association, the International Association of School Librarianship, the Texas Library Association, the National Council of Teachers of English, the International Children and Nature Network, and numerous state and regional conferences. Jo has collaborated with educators to develop a “Building Grit Kit” to help students build skills to enhance social and emotional learning and promote grit and resilience. She has presented to over 50,000 educators and other readers and professionals.

## 2026 Concurrent Session Presenters

**Heidi Hammond** is a former school librarian and a retired associate professor for the Master of Library and Information Science program at St. Catherine University in St. Paul, Minnesota. **Gail Nordstrom** is the public library consultant for Viking Library System in rural western Minnesota. Both Heidi and Gail served on the 2011 Randolph Caldecott Award Committee and co-authored *Reading the Art in Caldecott Award Books: A Guide to the Illustrations* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2014). They've made numerous presentations about visual literacy in picture books and co-taught graduate-level picture book courses, as well as picture book courses for the Association of Library Services to Children. Gail and Heidi have each been recognized by the Minnesota Library Association with the William G. Asp Distinguished Career Award.

**Dee Hare** has 27 years of experience working in public library services. She holds a Master of Library and Information Science from The University of Southern Mississippi with a certificate in Youth Services and Literature and a Bachelor of Arts degree in English education from Delta State University. She has recently retired from the Northeast Regional Library system.

**Leslie Hebert Helakoski** is a native of South Louisiana. She is the author and sometimes illustrator of 17 picture books. Most recent are *When the Rain Came Down* (Farrar, Straus, Giroux) and *Gator's Big Mouth* (Pelican). Leslie is also the author of the bestselling *Big Chickens* and *Woolbur* and the upcoming *Fake Gnus*. She teaches picture book workshops at the Highlights Foundation and around the country.

**Will Hillenbrand** is a celebrated author and illustrator, renowned for his impressive repertoire of 80 picture books that enchant young readers. His enchanting illustrations have adorned the works of many esteemed authors, including Verna Aardema and Jane Yolen. As a child, Hillenbrand's adventures in the streets of College Hill/Cincinnati inspired his storytelling journey. His book, *The Voice in the Hollow*, has been praised by *School Library Journal* as a remarkable fusion of striking illustrations and text, delivering a cozy winter adventure that defies the chill of its setting.

**Kay Hones** worked in K-12 San Francisco school libraries from 1987-2020. In 2013, she became the librarian at three San Francisco County high schools and established the first libraries at Civic Center and Hilltop. She currently mentors school librarians at Montana State University. She also volunteers every week at Hilltop Pregnant Minor High School. Kay presents workshops locally, at state, national library and teacher conferences, and internationally with IASL.

**Leigh Hood** is the administrative assistant and Branch Services coordinator for the Northeast Regional Library system. She has 19 years of experience working in public library services.

**Amanda Hope Izard** is a split-campus librarian for Randall High School and Randall Junior High School in Amarillo, Texas, and serves as the secondary lead librarian for Canyon ISD. Izard received a B.S. in library and information science from The University of Southern Mississippi in 2010, an M.L.I.S. from the University of Alabama in 2013, and is currently pursuing an Ed.D. in educational administration (P-12) from Southern Miss. A Mississippi Delta native, she currently resides in the Texas panhandle with her husband Caleb, daughter Haleigh, son Finn, and three dogs, Bear, Espen and Mochi. She enjoys road trips, iced coffee, Delta blues, video games, board games and TTRPGs.

**Lauren Landry-Jones** is the Youth Services/Library Assistant I at the Ina Thompson Moss Point Library within the Jackson-George Regional Library System. Lauren has been an educator most of her career, working with preschool through adult learners over the last 24 years in both school and public settings. As a teacher librarian, she was an instrumental part of her district receiving the Improving Literacy Through School Libraries Grant in 2009. She has a B.S. in elementary education with a minor in music history and theory from The University of Southern Mississippi and will be working toward her Master of Library and Information Science.

**Hanna Lee** has worked with young people and books for as long as she can remember. She has served in public libraries in Mississippi and New Jersey, in addition to public schools, international schools and higher education institutions from Baltimore, Md., to Maputo, Mozambique. Most recently, she served as chair of the 2025 Caldecott Committee. She was also a member of the 2024 Walter Awards Judging Committee and a 2019 Kirkus Prize Judge.

Longtime educator and author, **Andi Lehman**, writes engaging, original programs featuring live animals to teach the wonder of all creatures and the value of great books. In this session, Andi examines the features which make a program entertaining and educational. She offers suggestions for reviewing potential presenters and shares the elements that audiences say they most enjoy about "Andi's Life with Animals" presentations. Using her animal partners and a fast-paced PowerPoint, she includes program samples and tips from regional librarians to maximize the presenter/patron partnership and accomplish the ultimate goals of literacy, a love of learning, and regular use of our public libraries.

**Megan Lindsay** is the Youth Services librarian at the Hernando Public Library in Hernando, Miss. She received her M.L.I.S. degree in 2020 from The University of Southern Mississippi and has worked in libraries for seven years, including public and school libraries. Megan's favorite parts of being a Youth Services librarian are making displays, planning programs, and doing crafts with kids! In her spare time, Megan enjoys cuddling with her cats (Cupcake and Biscuit) and reading.

**Naomi Hurtienne Magola** is the reference librarian for the McLendon Library at the Raymond campus of Hinds Community College. She received her Master of Library and Information Science from The University of Southern Mississippi. She started her career as reference librarian in southeast Louisiana and is now back in Mississippi serving the public at her community college. She loves helping her community connect to the resources that they need and spreading the word of new and innovative technologies.

**Joi Mahand** serves as the academic program manager for the School of Library and Information Studies at the University of Alabama, where she also teaches as an adjunct instructor in the M.L.I.S. program. She has a background in public librarianship in Jefferson County, Ala., specializing in teen and adult services. She currently serves as a member of the 2026 Sibert Informational Book Medal Committee.

**Nancy So Miller** is a Korean American children's book author/illustrator and art teacher based in Savannah, Georgia. She creates handmade, dimensional paper worlds that capture the magic and joy of childhood, inviting viewers to feel part of the moment. Visit her website to view more of her work at [nmillerillustration.com](http://nmillerillustration.com).

## 2026 Concurrent Session Presenters

Hattiesburg native **Katie Molpus** joined the Humanities Council team in September 2023. She received a B.A. in psychology from Mississippi State University and an M.A. in English from the College of Charleston. Since returning to Mississippi in 2019, Katie has worked with the Mississippi Book Festival, the Mississippi Historical Society and Lemuria Bookstore. As program officer, Katie oversees and develops council-conducted programs, such as the Family Reading Project, Luciérnagas, Museum on Main Street, the Great Stories Club and Speakers Bureau.

**Angela Mullins** is a library media specialist with 26 years of experience in both the library and classroom. She earned her Master of Library and Information Science from The University of Southern Mississippi and her Specialist in Education from William Carey University. A proud mother of three and a bonus son-in-love, she enjoys reading, sewing and attending Comic Cons in her free time.

**Nancy Opalko** is a retired children's librarian with over 20 years of experience in the art of puppetry. Since retiring, she teaches puppet workshops and performs puppet shows both within her community and in surrounding areas.

**Alexis Reed** is an educator preparation instructor at Larry Summers Career and Technical Center in Yazoo City, Mississippi. A former school librarian with more than seven years of experience, she now prepares high school students for careers in education while promoting literacy, creativity and hands-on learning. Her work connects classroom instruction and career exploration, helping future educators see the possibilities within every story.

**Jody Ridgeway** is the circulation co-supervisor at the Laurel-Jones County Library. She started working at the library in 2021 and discovered after the fact that it was her dream job. She graduated from Southern Miss in 2013 with a B.A. in English literature and a minor in theatre. She loves reading library books with her two boys and listening to as many audiobooks as she can.

**Kalpana Saxena** is a professional storyteller who has told stories at festivals in the U.S. and India. She is the librarian at Trinity Episcopal School in New Orleans, where she also serves as a reading specialist.

**Alicia Schwarzenbach** is the Youth Services librarian at Ascension Parish Library in Louisiana. Alicia has co-presented at regional conferences, including the Fay B. Kaigler Children's Book Festival, as well as at national conferences, such as the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) National Institute and American Library Association's LibLearnX. She has co-published with Soline Holmes in ALSC's *Children and Libraries*, Book Links and a chapter in the ALA publication, *Mental Health and Children's Literature: Evaluating, Curating and Sharing Books with Children*. When not in a library, she enjoys puzzles, dogs and singing.

**Beth Shamley** is the Youth Services coordinator for First Regional Library. She has an M.L.I.S. from The University of Southern Mississippi. She is a member of MLA and the Gaming and Graphic Novel Roundtable. In her free time, she enjoys reading, crafting and playing video games.

**Marta Smally** is a dedicated educator and strategic leader whose life's work is rooted in service to families and the next generation. She serves as a youth specialist at the Horn Lake Public Library, and she also acts as the vice chair for two professional community-based organizations. A specialist in bridging cultural and

linguistic divides, Marta brings years of experience across the educational spectrum—from early childhood to secondary school. Her expertise as an ESL specialist and certified court interpreter makes her a vital resource for those navigating the complexities of immigration and naturalization, ensuring every individual has a voice in both the classroom and the legal system. Beyond her professional and board commitments, Marta is deeply invested in the heart of her community as a pastor's wife and a mother of five. Whether she is guiding a classroom, leading in the boardroom, or supporting her church, Marta's work is always driven by her passion for building a stronger, more inclusive community for all.

**Raven Spizale** began her library journey as a part-time circulation assistant in St. Tammany Parish Library back in 2010, where she fell in love with library life. After successfully obtaining her M.L.I.S. from The University of Southern Mississippi, she began working as a youth librarian at the Watson Branch of Livingston Parish Library. Quickly rising through the ranks, she became the head of Youth Services and then found a position at the St. Charles Parish Library, where she is the Youth Services librarian.

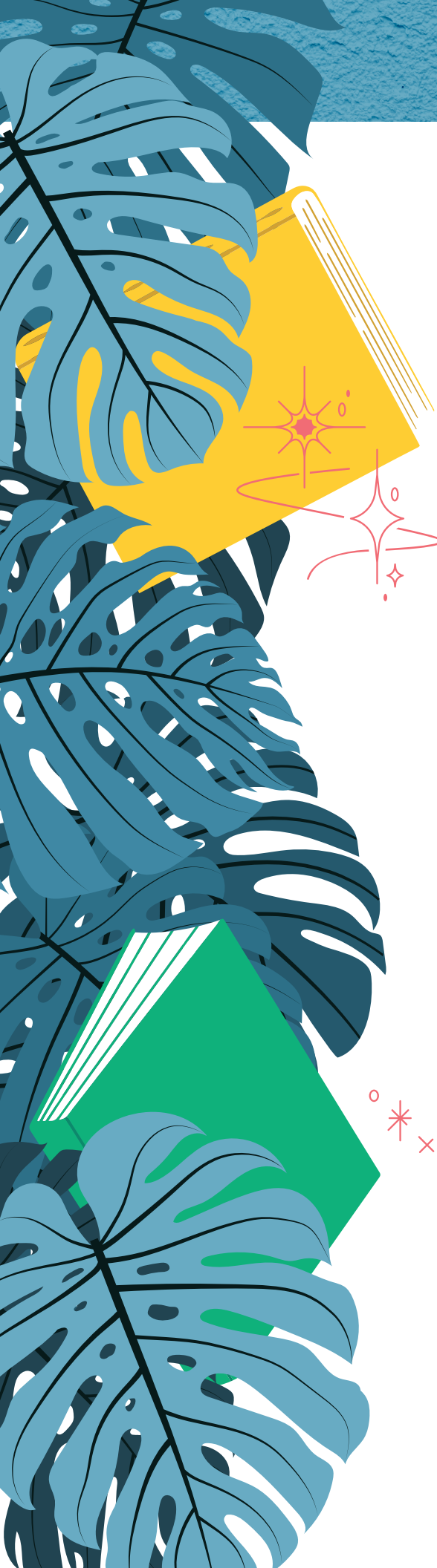
**Melanie Walker** is the K-12 librarian and eighth grade ELA teacher for Mount Olive Attendance Center in Mt. Olive, Miss. She is in her eighth year at Mount Olive and 13th in education total. Melanie graduated from William Carey University with a B.A. in English in 2012. A wife and mom to one son, she loves reading, traveling and theater.

**Ally Watkins** is a research and instruction librarian at the University of Mississippi Libraries. She is the UM Libraries liaison to the School of Education. She has worked in public, state and academic libraries in Mississippi for 16 years.

**Erica White** is the public relations and outreach coordinator for the Central Mississippi Regional Library System (CMRLS), a role she's proudly held since 2021. A lifelong lover of stories and community connection, Erica earned her bachelor's degree from Mississippi State University and went on to receive her Master of Library and Information Science from The University of Southern Mississippi. She first joined CMRLS as a Youth Services supervisor, where she discovered her talent for sparking curiosity, building relationships and creating joyful library experiences. Today, Erica channels that same energy into promoting library programs, engaging communities, and ensuring that people across the region know just how magical—and essential—their libraries can be.

**Meridith Wulff** has worked in public libraries since 2016 and currently serves as head librarian at the Lafayette County and Oxford Public Library, a branch of First Regional Library. Before that, she served for three years as youth specialist at the Lafayette County and Oxford branch and four years working to improve early literacy library service to the five-county region's most remote and underserved communities from the library's Words on Wheels BookWagon.

**Dawn Zimmerer** is the administrative librarian for the McLendon Library at the Raymond campus of Hinds Community College. She received her master's degree in library science from Southern Connecticut State University. Her journey into librarianship began as an intern at her hometown library in Ridgefield, Conn., and her professional career continued at the New York Public Library, where she honed her skills and developed a deep appreciation for the power of books to inspire and educate.



# 2026 Concurrent Session Descriptions

## **Show Me the Money\$**

Grant writing is a skill that can enrich and expand student learning. Educators who write and receive grants know their students' strengths and challenges. Grants support classroom and library educational goals, including literacy, information literacy, all curricular areas, ELL and special education, technology, field trips and adult professional development.

## **After-School Story Times: Planning Story Times for Elementary-Aged Children**

Would you like to launch a story time for older children, but you aren't sure where to start? Join us for a presentation that details how to plan and lead a story time geared toward elementary-aged children, ranging from 7 to 11 years old. We will cover everything from choosing books, games and songs to deciding what extension activities work best for this age group. Throughout the presentation, we will build an outline for a story time together so that you can leave with a solid plan to try at your own library!

## **AI in Action: A Practical Guide for Teaching and Research**

In this one-hour session, we'll explore how to teach AI fundamentals, foster AI literacy, and thoughtfully integrate AI into the research process. Designed with instructors in mind, this session includes practical strategies, instructional design tips, and hands-on examples to help you confidently bring AI into your classroom and research toolkit—no tech background needed!

## **Andi's Life with Animals: Partnering with Libraries to Promote the Appreciation of All Creatures and the Love of Reading**

Longtime educator and author, Andi Lehman, writes engaging, original programs featuring live animals to teach the wonder of all creatures and the value of great books. In this session, Andi examines the features which make a program entertaining and educational. She offers suggestions for reviewing potential presenters and shares the elements that audiences say they most enjoy about "Andi's Life with Animals" presentations. Using her animal partners and a fast-paced PowerPoint, she includes program samples and tips from regional librarians to maximize the presenter/patron partnership and accomplish the ultimate goals of literacy, a love of learning, and regular use of our public libraries.

## **Are They Older Than You Think They Are? Is Popular Young Adult Literature Aging Up?**

Are the protagonists in young adult literature getting older? This is a question that librarians and other educators have been discussing for quite some time. In this session, participants will learn about a research project that tackled this interesting question, and how the answers might affect library service to middle schoolers and young high schoolers.

## **Behind the Scenes with the Newbery and Caldecott: Perspectives from Two Recent Committee Chairs**

The Newbery and Caldecott Medals are two of the oldest, most prestigious and most recognizable awards in children's literature. But how are books selected for these honors? Join us, two recent committee chairs, for a fascinating behind-the-scenes look at the Newbery and the Caldecott—and leave with some new ideas on how to share award-winning titles with all the readers you know!

## **Better Together: The Power of Partnership**

Learn easy ways to partner and, in the process, expand and enrich your library's offerings while increasing its visibility to students, families, school administration and the community. Designed for both school and public librarians and full of practical tips for getting started, this session will include essential elements of successful partnerships, projects that lend themselves to partnering, how to be a good partner, and tips for managing obstacles.

## **Beyond the Library Walls: Creative and Strategic Outreach That Builds Community**

This session offers an overview of effective library outreach and how to engage diverse audiences. Attendees will learn how to identify target groups, build meaningful partnerships, and explore a variety of outreach methods—from community events to digital and passive engagement. The session also covers planning tools, evaluation strategies, and ways to overcome common barriers. Whether you're new to outreach or refining existing efforts, you'll leave with scalable ideas to help your library connect more effectively beyond its walls.

## 2026 Concurrent Session Descriptions

### **Bibliotherapy in Your Elementary Library**

This workshop uses carefully selected books to help children understand and cope with emotions, challenges and life experiences. Through stories, students can explore feelings, such as friendship, loss, fear or confidence in a safe and supportive setting. This workshop will highlight strategies for choosing appropriate titles, facilitating meaningful discussions, and integrating bibliotherapy into everyday library programs. Participants will leave with practical tools to promote social-emotional learning and well-being through literature.

### **Breakfast Book Clubs and More: Drawing Teens Into the School Library**

During the past four years, we have doubled our circulation at our high school library. We have become a hub of support and engagement for all students. This session will include a panel of high school students who will answer your questions about their favorite activities hosted in The Den at Petal High School.

### **Colorful Connections: Exploring Non-Destructive Art**

This session will show you basic digital art techniques and apps that help students explore their creativity on tablets. Participants will experiment with non-destructive art-making methods. Using free tools like Adobe Fresco in a hands-on, supportive setting, we will create art, which will be mirrored on the big screen. I'll also show pages from my basic shape Sketchnote Narrative Journaling method. The goal is to inspire new approaches in creativity, empowering students to create boldly and express themselves with confidence.

### **Community-Building Through the Humanities: How the Mississippi Humanities Council Can Support Libraries**

The Mississippi Humanities Council has been a long-time partner of Mississippi libraries through grants and programming. In this session, the Mississippi Humanities Council will discuss their council-conducted programs, such as reading programs, our Speakers Bureau and more, and the ways these programs can help strengthen the relationship between libraries and the communities they serve. Attendees can learn more about Humanities Council resources, hear firsthand from an MHC partner, and explore the ways that the humanities are building connections across the state.

### **Crafting Magic on a Shoestring: Budget-Friendly Ideas for SLP '26**

Get ready to roll up your sleeves and spark your creativity! This hands-on session is packed with easy, low-cost ideas perfect for SLP 2026 "Unearth a Story" programming – from weekly activities to easy-to-run passive programs. Whether you're working with a tiny budget or too few staff (or both!), you'll leave with dozens of projects that are simple, adaptable, and guaranteed to delight your patrons.

### **Engaging Student Curiosity and AI to Strengthen Literacy Skills**

Come learn practical ways AI can leverage student curiosity to empower students and strengthen literacy skills. Students curate a list of topics of interest. We turn this list into a springboard to propel student reading and writing. Handouts include activities, ethical AI tips, and assignments to put ideas into practice.

### **Exploring the Magnolia Book Awards, Mississippi Children's Choice Award**

The Magnolia Book Awards provide the children and youth of Mississippi the opportunity to nominate, read and vote for their favorite books. Please join us to learn more about the Magnolia Award and participate in discussion to explore integrating the Magnolia Award into school or public library settings. The Magnolia Award has four voting categories: pre-K-2nd Grade, 3rd-5th Grade, 6th-8th Grade, and 9th-12th Grade. Learn about the process and help us advocate for the Magnolia Awards, as we continue to offer children and youth in Mississippi opportunities to develop a lifelong love of reading.

### **For the Love of Language**

Meet books that invite readers to play with words along with the characters. Be a matchmaker for books to hang out with other books. This session will engage participants in word play from favorites to forgotten, new and old. Attendees will take away a list of books and activities that model word play, toy with idiosyncrasies of our lexicon, and ignite a love of words alongside book characters.

### **Genrefication and Dynamic Shelving for Beginners**

We will discuss benefits and tips on setting your school library up with genrefied fiction and/or dynamic style shelving. Stores set up this way for a reason! Attendees will leave with suggestions and a list of tools that can help.

### **Get Graphic**

Get Graphic presents a short history of graphic books and will highlight graphic books that focus on history. Students examined writing, art and production of non-fiction graphic books that reflect history from many viewpoints. This workshop includes a brief discussion of historical writing, strategies for reluctant readers, and it engages participants in a hands-on superhero activity!

### **Leveling Up: Harnessing the Power of Video Games in Library Spaces**

Video games have become a cornerstone of modern culture—bringing people together, fostering creativity, and offering new pathways for learning and connection. Attendees will learn about the benefits of gaming, along with guidance for integrating video games into library programming. We'll cover how to select appropriate consoles and games for your community and understand and communicate ESRB ratings to parents and caregivers. Whether you're a gaming novice or a seasoned player, you'll leave inspired and equipped to build an inclusive, engaging, future-ready library space through the power of play.

### **Miniature Worlds and Storytelling: Creating Dioramas for Picture Books**

Step into the enchanting world of miniature set design and visual storytelling with author-illustrator Nancy So Miller. Nancy will share her creative process: from concept and material exploration to photographing miniature scenes that capture mood and emotion. Drawing inspiration from her picture book, *Sun, Moon and Star*, she'll demonstrate how traditional storytelling and tactile art techniques intertwine to create whimsical, detailed environments.

## 2026 Concurrent Session Descriptions

### **The Mississippi Library Commission Salutes America 250—Mississippi with Literacy Research and Special Assistance**

To support the America 250-Mississippi Commission in their work to promote the historic and important 250-year milestone, the Mississippi Library Commission (MLC) has designed a plan that honors the accomplishment through a patriotic literacy campaign. They are calling it “*COME READ WITH US: Great Readers Can Become Great Leaders.*” This presentation will help librarians learn about the services that the MLC can provide, both during this time of celebration and beyond!

### **Once Upon a Career: Building Dreams Through Story Time**

Children’s books do more than tell stories; they open doors to future possibilities. This session explores how educators and librarians can use picture books to introduce early learners to a wide range of careers while strengthening literacy and curiosity. Participants will discover engaging titles, discussion prompts, and activity ideas that connect story time to real-world skills. Attendees will leave inspired to use literature as a bridge between imagination and career awareness.

### **Out From the Margins: Elevating Diverse Stories in Nonfiction for Youth**

Each year, a Robert F. Sibert Informational Book Medal Committee is formed to review and discuss hundreds of newly released nonfiction titles for youth that span a wide range of styles, subjects and approaches. This session will highlight Sibert-eligible titles published in 2025 that elevate the voices of underrepresented communities by highlighting stories that are designed to inspire, educate and engage readers. This session aims to encourage LIS professionals to look at the newly released titles that represent the stories and histories of groups that have been relegated to the margins, bring those stories and histories to the forefront of their collections, and consider how representation contributes to the ALA core values of equity and access.

### **Out of the Nursery Rhymes**

Take nursery rhymes out of the nursery! Use these timeless rhymes to explore STEAM concepts and just have fun! Children from pre-K to 6th grade will enjoy activities suitable for literacy and family engagement events.

### **Puppet Camp 101: A Hands-on Intro for Librarians**

In this interactive program, participants will learn easy and fun strategies for incorporating puppets into their library programs. Whether they are used behind a puppet stage for a performance or out in the open during a story time, the addition of puppets can be a great way to inspire the love of stories in children of all ages. This workshop will encourage participants to think of puppetry in a new way.

### **Reading the Art in Picture Books: Exploring the Interplay of Text and Illustrations**

Two past Caldecott Committee members will guide participants to better understand and appreciate how illustrations contribute to the narrative in picture books. Participants will learn about artistic elements and peritext, as well as how design contributes to exemplary picture books by a diverse range of illustrators. With this knowledge, participants will analyze noteworthy recent picture books in groups. They will leave the program empowered to discuss with confidence both stories and illustrations in picture books.

### **Rolling for Literacy: Using Dungeons and Dragons to Build Reading, Writing and Communication Skills in the Library**

Dungeons and Dragons (D&D) is more than a fantasy role-playing game—it’s a storytelling engine that promotes critical thinking, collaboration and literacy. In this session, participants will explore how libraries can harness tabletop role-playing games (TTRPGs) like D&D to engage readers, support creative writing, strengthen comprehension and foster oral communication. Attendees will leave with ready-to-use strategies for incorporating D&D into library programming for middle school, high school or public library settings.

### **Rolling Into Schools: Creative Ways to Bring the Library to Students**

This presentation is not only about how one library managed to connect with its public school systems with its Library Trolley, but it will also help attendees find ways they can get into their public school systems even without a bookmobile. Attendees will learn where to start, what schools to approach first, administration buy-in, how to schedule visits, etc. Near the end of the presentation, attendees and presenters will brainstorm ideas on what we as librarians can do to further our collaboration with our public school librarians.

### **Shelf Care and Brainstorms: Library Think Tank**

Let’s be honest, some of the best ideas happen when you least expect it, like when you’re just chatting with a colleague. “Shelf Care and Brainstorms” is a focused, creative breakout session for librarians and students to share ideas and swap stories. It’s not a presentation; it’s a conversation. Come connect and see what happens when library brains get together.

### **Tales and Tunes in Tandem: Enriching Early Literacy Through Music in Story Time**

Can’t carry a tune in a bucket? Guess what? The kids don’t care! Instruments, dancing, CDs, streaming music, scarves, eggs and more—research shows how important rhythm is in early literacy and even beyond into fluency.

### **Teen Book Fair: Engaging Teens in Collection Development**

Let the teens select! Welcome to this presentation of a turnkey program that allows your teens to make collection development decisions. This creates a sense of ownership in the collection and assures that teens are interested in the books selected for acquisition.

### **Word Play; Making Words Work**

Wordplay—What’s it doing for you? This session will discuss how words can do more than just give information. The right word and placement can create or emphasize a mood, add tension, show excitement and highlight character traits. In picture books, where every word is precious, we can get the most out of the words we choose. Using examples from picture books, the author will use sensory detail, figurative language, sound and rhythm, word order and length. Activities include word games, mood mapping and soundscaping. This session is designed to make reading, writing (and rewriting) fun.



# 2026 Festival Schedule

## Wednesday, April 8

### 8:30-9:30 A.M. CONCURRENT SESSIONS

**A1. Breakfast Book Clubs and More: Drawing Teens Into the School Library**

Crystal Giles; School  
ROOM 210 (.1 CEU)

**A2. Teen Book Fair: Engaging Teens in Collection Development**

Raven Spizale, Alicia Schwarzenbach and John Cavalier;  
Programming, Public Libraries  
ROOM 214 (.1 CEU)

**A3. Better Together: The Power of Partnership**

Meridith Wulff and Erica Brady; Programming, Public  
ROOM 216 (.1 CEU)

**A4. Once Upon a Career: Building Dreams Through Story Time**

Alexis Reed; Storytelling  
ROOM 218 A (.1 CEU)

### 9:45-10:45 A.M. CONCURRENT SESSIONS

**B1. Bibliotherapy in Your Elementary Library**

Angela Mullins; School  
ROOM 210 (.1 CEU)

**B2. Rolling Into Schools: Creative Ways to Bring the Library to Students**

Ethan Glenn and Jody Ridgeway; Community Outreach  
ROOM 214 (.1 CEU)

**B3. Are They Older Than You Think They Are? Is Popular Young Adult Literature Aging Up?**

Ally Watkins; Young Adult Literature  
ROOM 216 (.1 CEU)

**B4. Word Play: Making Words Work**

Leslie Hebert Helakoski; Storytelling  
ROOM 218 A (.1 CEU)

**B5. Andi's Life with Animals: Partnering with Libraries to Promote the Appreciation of All Creatures and the Love of Reading**

Andi Lehman; Programming, Public  
ROOM 218 B (.1 CEU)

### 11 A.M. WELCOME SESSION

TCC BALLROOMS

### NOON-1:30 P.M. COLEEN SALLEY LUNCHEON, MOLLY IDLE

TCC BALLROOMS (.1 CEU)

### 1:45-2:45 P.M. KEYNOTE SESSION, DON TATE

TCC BALLROOMS (.1 CEU)

### 3-4 P.M. CONCURRENT SESSIONS

**C1. For the Love of Language**

Pat Austin and Kalpana Saxena;  
School Libraries  
ROOM 218 B (.1 CEU)

**C2. Exploring the Magnolia Book Awards, Mississippi's Children's Choice Award**

Wendy Daughdrill; School, Public  
ROOM 214 (.1 CEU)

**C3. Miniature Worlds and Storytelling: Creating Dioramas for Picture Books**

Nancy So Miller; Storytelling  
ROOM 216 (.1 CEU)

**C4. After-School Story Times: Planning Story Times for Elementary-Aged Children**

Lauren Adams and Megan Lindsay;  
Programming/Public  
ROOM 218 A (.1 CEU)

**C5. The Mississippi Library Commission Salutes America 250 – MS with Literacy Research, and Special Assistance**

Mississippi Library Commission  
ROOM 210 (.1 CEU)

### 3-4 P.M. AUTOGRAPHING

BARNES AND NOBLE

### 4:15-5:30 P.M. DE GRUMMOND LECTURE, JOHN GREEN

BENNETT AUDITORIUM (.1 CEU)

## Digital Only Presentation

### GET GRAPHIC

Kay Hones; Anime, Comics  
and Graphic Novels  
(.1 CEU)



## Thursday, April 9

### **8-8:45 A.M.** **SLIS BREAKFAST SOCIAL**

ROOMS 218 A/B

### **9-10 A.M.** **KEYNOTE SESSION, BEN CLANTON**

TCC BALLROOMS (.1 CEU)

### **10:15-11:15 A.M.** **MEDALLION SESSION, MEG MEDINA**

TCC BALLROOMS (.1 CEU)

### **11:30 A.M.-1 P.M.** **EZRA JACK KEATS AWARD LUNCHEON**

TCC BALLROOMS (.1 CEU)

### **1:15-2:15 P.M.** **EZRA JACK KEATS PANEL**

TCC BALLROOMS (.1 CEU)

### **2:30-4 P.M.** **AUTOGRAPHING**

BARNES AND NOBLE

### **3-4 P.M.** **CONCURRENT SESSIONS**

#### **D1. Puppet Camp 101: A Hands-on Intro for Librarians**

Nancy Opalko, Erica Brady and Meridith Wulff; Programming, Public  
ROOM 210 (.1 CEU)

#### **D2. Reading the Art in Picture Books: Exploring the Interplay of Text and Illustrations**

Heidi Hammond and Gail Nordstrom; Visual Literacy  
ROOM 214 (.1 CEU)

#### **D3. Out of the Nursery Rhymes**

Ginger Davis; Programming, STEAM  
ROOM 218 A (.1 CEU)

#### **D4. Rolling for Literacy: Using Dungeons and Dragons to Build Reading, Writing and Communication Skills in the Library**

Amanda Hope Iazard; School, Public  
ROOM 218 B (.1 CEU)

#### **D5. Community-Building Through the Humanities: How the Mississippi Humanities Council Can Support Libraries**

Katie Molpus and Marta Smally; Community Outreach, Public, School  
ROOM 216 (.1 CEU)

### **3-4:30 P.M.** **THE LIBRARIANS FILM SCREENING**

TCC BALLROOMS

## Friday, April 10

### **9-10 A.M.** **KEYNOTE SESSION, LEE OSTERTAG**

TCC BALLROOMS (.1 CEU)

### **10:15-11:30 A.M.** **AUTOGRAPHING**

BARNES AND NOBLE

### **10:30-11:30 A.M.** **CONCURRENT SESSIONS**

#### **E1. Out From the Margins: Elevating Diverse Stories in Nonfiction for Youth**

Joi Mahand; Nonfiction  
ROOM 216 (.1 CEU)

#### **E2. Colorful Connections: Exploring Non-Destructive Art**

Will Hillenbrand; Other  
ROOM 218 A (.1 CEU)

#### **E3. Leveling Up: Harnessing the Power of Video Games in Library Spaces**

Beth Shamley; Programming, Public  
ROOM 214 (.1 CEU)

#### **E4. Behind the Scenes with the Newbery and Caldecott: Perspectives from Two Recent Committee Chairs**

Ramona Caponegro and Hanna Lee; Book Talks, Best New Books  
ROOM 210 (.1 CEU)

### **NOON-1:30 P.M.** **SLIS LECTURE LUNCHEON, AMANDA JONES**

TCC BALLROOMS (.1 CEU)

### **1:45-2:45 P.M.** **CONCURRENT SESSIONS**

#### **F1. Shelf Care and Brainstorms: Library Think Tank**

Ethan Glenn and Kandice Evans; Programming, Public  
ROOM 216 (.1 CEU)

#### **F2. AI in Action: A Practical Guide for Teaching and Research**

Dawn Zimmerer and Naomi Hurtienne Magola; Social Media/Technology  
ROOM 218 B (.1 CEU)

#### **F3. Crafting Magic on a Shoestring: Budget-Friendly Ideas for SLP '26**

Dee Hare and Leigh Hood; Programming, Public  
ROOM 214 (.1 CEU)

#### **F4. Beyond the Library Walls: Creative and Strategic Outreach that Builds Community**

Erica White; Community Outreach  
ROOM 210 (.1 CEU)

### **3-4 P.M.** **CONCURRENT SESSIONS**

#### **G1. Genrefication and Dynamic Shelving for Beginners**

Melanie Walker; School  
ROOM 210 (.1 CEU)

#### **G2. \$how Me the Money\$**

Kay Hones; School, Public  
ROOM 216 (.1 CEU)

#### **G3. Tales and Tunes in Tandem: Enriching Early Literacy Through Music in Story Time**

Lauren Landry-Jones, Programming, Public  
ROOM 218 A (.1 CEU)

# Credits

## Members of the 2026 Medallion Selection Committee

**Dr. Stacy Creel**, Chair, Director/Associate Professor, The University of Southern Mississippi

**Dr. Karlie Herndon**, Curator, The de Grummond Children's Literature Collection

**Dr. Eric Tribunella**, Professor, The University of Southern Mississippi

**Venetia Oglesby**, Librarian, New Hope Elementary School

**Don Tate**, Author-Illustrator

**Dr. Jamie Naidoo**, Director, Foster-EBSCO Endowed Professor, The University of Alabama

**Phil Bildner**, Author and Founder of The Author Village

**Dr. Ramona Caponegro**, Professor, The University of Alabama

**Ann Sanders**, Programs and Partnerships Manager/Branch Librarian, Jackson Hinds Library System

**Teresa Spiers**, Youth Specialist at the B.J. Chain Public Library

**Angie Manfredi**, Author and Librarian, Los Alamos Middle School

## Steering Committee

**Dr. Stacy Creel**, Director/Associate Professor, The University of Southern Mississippi

**Dr. Sarah Mangrum**, Assistant Teaching Professor, The University of Southern Mississippi

**Dr. Karlie Herndon**, Curator, The de Grummond Children's Literature Collection

**Dr. Mary Osborne**, Special Events and Outreach, Southern Miss School of Library and Information Science

**Lorraine Stuart**, Head of Special Collections and Curator of Historical Manuscripts/Professor, The University of Southern Mississippi

## 2026 Kaigler Ambassadors

**Shuya Su**, University of Florida

**Emma Murphy**, The University of Alabama

**May Reilly**, Simmons University

**Lily Martinez**, The University of Southern Mississippi

**Jay Johnston**, The University of Southern Mississippi

**Samantha Ray**, Louisiana State University

## Special Thanks

The Fay B. Kaigler Children's Book Festival expresses appreciation to the following for their contributions to the success of the 2026 festival:

**Dr. Joseph S. Paul**, *President, The University of Southern Mississippi*

**Dr. Lance Nail**, *Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs, The University of Southern Mississippi*

**Dr. Trenton E. Gould**, *Dean, College of Education and Human Sciences, The University of Southern Mississippi*

**Dr. Stacy Creel**, *Director, School of Library and Information Science, The University of Southern Mississippi*

**The Estate of Fay B. Kaigler**

**The family of Coleen Salley** *for their continued support of the Festival*

**Dr. Deborah Pope and the Ezra Jack Keats Foundation** *for their continued support of the Festival*

**Dr. Teresa S. Welsh**, *Professor Emeritus, for her continued support of the Festival*

**The Mississippi Library Commission**

**Faculty, staff and students** *of the School of Library and Information Science, The University of Southern Mississippi*

**Heather Graves, Hillary Lovinggood, David Tisdale** *and the team at University Communications*

**Ralph Savarese** *and his team at Southern Miss Catering*

**Catherine Strange** *and The Henington House*

*Volunteers* **Stephen Parks, Sharon Zala, Kimberly Bonner, Bridget Reeves and Jen Roy**

**Flathau's Fine Catering**

**Twin Forks Wine and Provisions**





**THE FAY B. KAIGLER  
CHILDREN'S BOOK FESTIVAL**  
THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

