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# School's Out for Summer... But Not for These Teachers and Librarians

By Patricia J. Murphy | Jul 25, 2022

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Like the Alice Cooper song says, for kids, there may be “No more pencils, no more books, no more teachers’ dirty looks/ Out for summer, out ‘til fall,” but this is not the case for their teachers and librarians. Many are busily brainstorming ideas and dutifully making plans for the upcoming school year in their classrooms and libraries. *PW* spoke with four such educators about some of their summer plans, which include reflecting, recharging, and preparing for the academic year ahead.

Before **Barbara Johnson**, the school librarian at Jack Jackter Intermediate School in Colchester, Conn., packs her camper and travels with her husband along the eastern seaboard, she’ll spend a good chunk of her summertime immersed in a variety of preparation for the 2022–2023 school year. In fact, it all started the first week of summer vacation, when she took part in district curriculum meetings to help build schools’ collections of books to support what is being taught in the classroom.



© Kimberly Hebb

Barbara Johnson in her classroom.

One of Johnson’s curricular focuses is to further diversify and promote inclusivity with the read alouds that she and her teachers will be using. She’ll do this by selecting titles by diverse authors and characters. Because of an increase in neurodiverse students in her school’s population, she’ll also be looking to add titles with neurodiverse characters and themes.

“While many books have dealt with neurodiversity in the past,” Johnson said, “unless you point them out, you might not know it. So, by bringing attention to these titles—and adding new titles—our neurodiverse kids will be able to see themselves in books where they don’t normally see themselves fitting in, and others might learn empathy for them.”

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Johnson also plans to find the time to update her digital classes, noting any holes or gaps her students have due to remote learning. Then there’s her to-be-read pile featuring the latest titles, her state’s Nutmeg Award list books, and the ones that she picked up at both the AASL Conference in Salt Lake City and the American Library Association conference in Washington, D.C., which she attended earlier in the summer. “Because my teachers are busy creating curriculum and teaching their students, many may not have on their radar the latest diverse or inclusive titles, so I’ll suggest these new titles as replacements for books that they may normally choose each year.”

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With each book, Johnson will take copious notes on Post-its that she'll add to book descriptions in her library's Destiny Management System, aka Destiny Follett. "This way, I can check if the books' descriptions are accurate so when my students are searching for books we can find the ones that they're looking for—and hopefully interest them," she said.

In the meantime, Johnson will be looking for the best campsites where she can listen to the crash of the waves, roast marshmallows, enjoy a little R&R, and start on the next book on her TBR pile, and the next. She can't help herself. "I'm always preparing for the next step and looking for ways to save time for the next year," Johnson said. "This allows me to have more time for personal conversations with my students to give them recommendations, to model skills on how to use the library to find the best books for them. It's a life skill that will help them be independent readers."

**Katie Reilley's** summer plans include preparations for her classroom, her students, and herself. These preparations began even before the school year ended. Reilley, a fourth-grade ELA teacher at Blackberry Creek Elementary School in Elburn, Ill., had to move her entire classroom from downstairs to upstairs. And, while she was at it, she got a head start on the herculean task of re-evaluating and curating her extensive classroom library. "I'm going through my library to look at what wasn't read this year, what's falling apart and needs to be replaced—or needs additional copies, what books I may need to buy for a series, and what books have gone missing," Reilley said. "And, at the same time, I'm creating lists and buying these books over the summer."

These tasks are especially crucial because her school doesn't have a school librarian. "If kids don't have librarians reading and recommending books, who is going to do this? Who's going to help them get the reading bug?" Reilley said. So Reilley is the one who will be making recommendations to her kids about the books they may be interested in reading—and matching books with kids.

Because of her tireless commitment to her students' literacy, and a growing urgency to help them with academics and SEL issues due to the pandemic and other stressors, Reilley said that summer turns out to be the only time she can prepare her curriculum, her classroom library, her #ClassroomBookADay read-alouds, and herself for the road ahead. She also takes time to read professional development books. So far this summer, she's read John Schu's *The Gift of Story* and has Donalyn Miller and Teri Lesesne's *The Joy of Reading* on her TBR pile. "These books help me recharge, re-energize my purpose, and refocus on why I teach ELA," Reilley said. "When I'm so mentally and physically exhausted at the end of the school year, these books give me that, 'This is why you do what you do' kind of feeling!"

Reilley also feels it's important during the summer to prioritize her personal needs. She has planned a trip to the upper peninsula of Michigan with her daughters and extended family, various get-togethers with friends and colleagues, plus a last-minute trip to Iceland with her sister-law before school starts. "Then, when I go back to school and that sense of urgency hits again, I'll remind myself: 'You had your time to recharge, and now, it's time to hit the ground, and do what's best for the kids.'"



© Rob Reilley

Katie Reilley with Page Turner, the mascot at the Town and Country Public Library in Elburn.



Erin Bedell.

**Erin Bedell** can't help but be inspired by the view of the Rocky Mountains and Pikes Peak from her library at Inspiration View Elementary in Colorado Springs, Colo. But it's this teacher/librarian's students who inspire her the most—even in the summertime. That's because part of her summer plans included keeping her school library open for two hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays throughout June. "The only prerequisite was for the parents to come with kids, not drop them off for free babysitting."

Bedell said the benefits were endless. "I got to know the parents," Bedell said. "During Covid this was a challenge because parents did not have access to the building." It also allowed her to bond with her students, and helped her students discover new books. "I usually only see them 26 at a time," Bedell said. "So this summer library time gave us a chance to get to know each other better, the kids a chance to continue reading throughout the summer, and our families to focus on literacy."

Families could also partake in coloring activities and puzzles, and grab food donations if they needed them. On top of being available for book recommendations and friendly conversation, Bedell was busy processing a large book order that came without the normal lamination and labeling, as well as rethinking her shelves with an eye toward what Kelsy Bogan, MSLIS calls Dynamic Shelving. "It's basically arranging your shelves to make them more appealing," Bedell said. "It's like helping the books say, 'Pick me!' 'Check me out!'" She said that ways to go from static to dynamic shelves include forward facing the covers of books and devising displays that constantly change as books are being checked in and out.

Bedell will also be checking out the latest books, sharing ARCs with other teachers and librarians and tweeting about them as part of the #BookPosse Twitter group. In addition, she will be adding author photos and letters that she's received as part of their Twittiverse interactions to her library's author bulletin board.



Bedell's author wall.

She hopes that keeping up the bulletin board and inviting authors to visit her school make authors and writing careers more accessible to her students. Both efforts fit nicely into Bedell's ultimate teacher/librarian goal. "I want to share the joy of reading and books with my students—and create a space where reading is fun and joyful," she said. "As educators, we have a responsibility to teach the fundamentals of reading *and* why it's fun, and why people like to read. If we only teach the skills, our kids will be missing out!"

**Kristin Sierra** wouldn't dream of missing the opportunity this summer to soak in the beauty of the Pacific Northwest, whether it's biking, hiking, or swimming with her family. And this teacher/librarian at Lincoln High School in Tacoma, Wash., will do all of the above, but not before she dives into her summer reading programming and planning for the upcoming school year.

First up is her summer reading program partnership with the Tacoma Public Library, nonprofits, and Metro Parks Tacoma, offering a variety of books to read and field trips (some book-related) for her students to go on together. "We'll meet at school and take public transportation. For example, we'll be going to a beautiful park, having a picnic, and discussing a book we're reading." This summer, Sierra and participating students are reading *Where the Crawdads Sing*. "We'll be meeting twice, taking some nature trips since the book is nature-orientated, communicating through Schoology [a learning management system that allows them to communicate with each other]," Sierra said. "And we're seeing the movie together."



© Dawn Baughman

Kristin Sierra with Jason Reynolds.

In the fall, Sierra will partner again with the library to kick off Tacoma Reads, where the library chooses one title each in three categories: adults, teens and young adults, and kids and families. Once she learns of the YA selection, Sierra promotes the book, its author, and the library's reading incentive program from day one. "There'll be a visit with the author and a variety of activities," she said. "So, come August, I'll start creating different presentations, trailers, and interactive activities around the book and the author to encourage students to sign up at the library. I like to keep it fresh and do something different every year. It's a great way to help launch the school year!"

Sierra will also be catching up on what's new in YA literature, deciding on which titles she'll recommend to her students and thinking about her library's maker space. "I try to integrate physical aspects of the book into the space," she said. "I almost always use it with different discussions to coincide with our books."

Sierra is also booking that aforementioned down time to camp, swim, and lounge around with family. However, thoughts of the upcoming school year are never too far away—and for good reason. "By doing some school things over the summer, it takes away some of the stress that builds as summer turns to fall. It also helps me feel more confident on the first day of school," Sierra said. "For me, I don't need to take a complete break, because I can't stop thinking about something that I just love."

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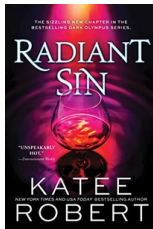


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