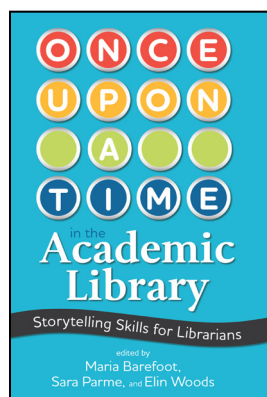


Book Reviews



Once Upon a Time in the Academic Library: Storytelling Skills for Librarians. Maria Barefoot, Sara Parme, and Elin Woods, eds. Chicago, IL: Association of College & Research Libraries, 2022. 166p. Paper, \$56.00 (\$50.40 ALA Members) (ISBN: 978-0-8389-3860-7).



The value of *Once Upon a Time in the Academic Library: Storytelling Skills for Librarians* lies in its practical suggestions to improve the student's experience with and knowledge of the library and their information literacy skills through the use of stories. The idea that librarians can use stories to teach information literacy, promote their services and collections, and make connections with students is not new. The book's value lies in the practical suggestions for doing so.

The theme of social justice appears prominently throughout. For example, those interested in creating antiracist libraries may find the suggestions in the book of particular interest. The authors consider issues of race, gender, class, sexuality, and privilege in stories told and not told in libraries. They discuss the ways middle-class American whiteness is often centered; consequently, the perspectives of many students are typically left out. Thus, marginalized students often feel unwelcome in the library.

At 166 pages, the book is a quick read. This is not a rigorous academic work or research study on using stories. Rather, it is a story about telling stories. The book is written in a conversational style that is simple and flows well. After an introduction, the book has 10 chapters written by different authors. In each chapter, librarians share their personal stories about telling stories in their everyday work. Most of the chapters are about using stories with undergraduate students during information literacy sessions. Each chapter includes an introduction to the story, the storytelling goal, the audience, the theory, the cultural considerations (the ways authors "were or were not using stories outside of their own space" [13]), and practical examples (including reproductions of exercises, handouts, emails, transcripts, and other details enabling you to replicate the lesson or service at your library). Instruction librarians will find these valuable.

One limitation of the book is that, despite their enthusiasm in the power of stories, the authors do not provide adequate evidence that stories are effective. The evidence consists of assertions, anecdotal observations, testimonials, and theoretical insights into storytelling rather than data. While the testimonials provided sound like the individual student or faculty who offered it benefited, can we be sure absent any other data? This is a recurring problem with the book as we are introduced to examples of storytelling with no statistical evidence showing their effectiveness. If any improvement or benefit is pointed out, the authors infer causality and attribute it to the stories without examining the possibility that other factors are causing the desired behavior.

In the introduction, the editors present one of their important themes—their ideas on counterstorytelling. They write this is "a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told, including people of color, the poor, and members of the LGBTQ

community” (16). This is important because it enables those in marginal positions to challenge dominant stories. While the book encourages the use of counterstories, it does offer much guidance around the tensions that may emerge when members of the majority work with marginalized stories.

In her chapter “Call and Response: Delicate Conversations in Collection Development,” Alexis L. Pavenick gets closest to doing this when she tells the story of inviting members of the LGBTQIA+ community to make book purchase recommendations on LGBTQIA+-related content. She shares her thought process when considering the recommendation to purchase the book *Leathersex: A Guide for the Curious Outsider and the Serious Player* by Joseph W. Bean, “a well-known figure in the gay bondage scene and its related communities in the US” (107). Concerned about the book’s tone, approach, and fit for the general collection, she chose not to buy it.

Pavenick does not inform us if she is or is not a member of the LGBTQIA+ community. If she is not, what reasons does she have in rejecting the request, especially after she invited members of that marginalized community to suggest purchases? When she reveals “at the end of the day, I’m in charge of the collection,” (109) it appears to be a professional right that is ultimately tied to institutional power rather than a marginalized lived experience. Her concern about the book’s alignment with the general collection is based on criteria produced by dominant institutions. In this way, selections based on established traditions reinforce the stories of the majority and can prevent the addition of counterstories because they are not like the books already in the collection.

The editors and authors of this book, who appear to be largely from the majority, do not consider the possibility that minority students may not want or welcome the use of their counterstories to teach information literacy or to promote libraries. Nor do they seem to consider the possibility that librarians may have to prepare for conflict, controversy, and argument if they increasingly weave race, gender, sexuality, indigeneity, privilege, and other potentially emotional issues into their lessons. What right and expertise do white librarians, for instance, have for using or developing stories about indigenous people? The point of this objection is not to discourage librarians from seeking out ignored stories, but that doing so may be more complicated than *Once Upon a Time in the Academic Library* suggests. The book would benefit from more attention to the complexity and tensions that may emerge when librarians work with stories that are not their own.

Despite these problems, *Once Upon a Time in the Academic Library* provides readers with a nice introduction to librarians using stories in their everyday work. Ideally, the book will spread the awareness of storytelling in libraries and inspire librarians to try it. If every librarian has a story to tell, we can look forward to a lot more stories.—David J. Brier, *University of Hawai’i at Mānoa*

M.C. Kinniburgh. *Wild Intelligence: Poets’ Libraries and the Politics of Knowledge in Postwar America.* Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2022. 224p. Paper, \$28.95 (ISBN: 978-1625346551).

The poet’s reading is integral to the poet’s writing. Yet the relative importance any particular subject material may hold in the poet’s work may appear elusive, often only to be revealed by way of keen-eyed archival digging. Thus, as M.C. Kinniburgh argues in *Wild Intelligence: Poets’ Libraries and the Politics of Knowledge in Postwar America*, “The poet’s library as an ar-