The Illinois Library Association Reporter

is a forum for those who are improving and reinventing Illinois libraries, with articles that seek to: explore new ideas and practices from all types of libraries and library systems; examine the challenges facing the profession; and inform the library community and its supporters with news and comment about important issues. The *ILA Reporter* is produced and circulated with the purpose of enhancing and supporting the value of libraries, which provide free and equal access to information. This access is essential for an open democratic society, an informed electorate, and the advancement of knowledge for all people.

ON THE COVER

Illustrator Sarah Ferone made time at the 2025 American Library Association's Annual Conference to stop by the iREAD booth. As one of the featured illustrators for the upcoming 2026 theme, *Plant a Seed, Read*, Ferone autographed recipe cards featuring her artwork for visitors in the Exhibit Hall. Ferone's specialty is in food & beverage and nature illustrations so her work pairs perfectly with the 2026 theme!

This issue also features an interview with another 2026 iREAD illustrator— Hatem Aly—where he talks about his love of libraries and his journey to becoming an illustrator. If you'll be attending the ILA Annual Conference, remember to register for the Youth Services Forum Breakfast featuring Wendy Xu! Lastly, keep an eye on the iREAD website (www.iREADprogram.org) to stay updated on when the iREAD store opens later this fall. Don't forget! ILA Institutional Members receive a complimentary downloadable version of each year's Resource Guide, upon request, once it becomes available.

iREAD 2026: *Plant a Seed, Read* is rooted in the concept of farm to table. A farm grows food that nourishes our bodies; a library grows ideas that nourish our minds. Both food and stories connect us to our family, culture, economy, and ecology. iREAD 2026: *Plant a Seed, Read* will provide a context for exploring culture, history, science, health, and human connection.

CONTENTS

ANNOUNCEMENTS

| **Amani Rashid,** Orland Park Public Library & Palos Heights Public Library |

The Storyteller's Journey: Building a Community through Arabic Storytelling

As excited children and parents wait outside Room 104, an announcement for Arabic Bilingual Storytime begins, given by Alexander Pappas, Orland Park Public Library's Children's Librarian. My storytime partner's voice echoes throughout the Youth Department. Several children hurry to the front row, eagerly anticipating the storytime's theme, which often includes games and songs. The familiar and new faces with their friendly smiles and laughter inspire me to continue creating a welcoming space where everyone feels they belong.

Alex cheerfully begins, "Hello, I'm Alex!" I smile and greet, "Marhaba wa Asalamu Alaykum, I'm Amani! We are excited you're all here with us for an exciting time." The greetings and storytimes are offered in English and Arabic, creating an inclusive, welcoming environment for everyone. Alex and I enthusiastically introduce today's storytime theme, "Colors," with a picture book filled with interactive images and inserts that keep the kids engaged and moving. During storytime, the children get ready to shake, twist, and jump along with Alex and me to an Arabic children's song, incorporating a movement activity. With excitement, everyone counts in Arabic from one to ten, "Wahad, Ithnayn, Thalatha, etc.," and jumps with joy when they reach ten, shouting, "Ashara!" Before Arabic Storytime concludes, we introduce the "Guess the Color in Arabic" game, giving the children an opportunity to enhance their understanding and knowledge of assorted colors in Arabic. As Arabic Storytime comes to an end, Alex and I say together, "See you next time! Ma'asalama. Goodbye!"

My journey to Arabic Storytime began at Orland Park Public Library (OPPL) in 2021, when I stepped into my new position as an Adult Services Assistant. From the very beginning, I was encouraged to lean into my passion for storytelling and to find ways to serve Arabic-speaking families in the community. My supervisor, Natalie Finlon, believed in both my voice and my vision, encouraging me to pursue programs, resources, and services, all while continuing my education. In 2022, with her support, I returned to school to further my education and professional growth, enrolling in the Library and Information Technology program at the College of DuPage. It was a big step, but I never felt alone. The encouragement didn't stop with Natalie; Mary Adamowski, OPPL's Director, and the entire Adult Services Department were just as uplifting. Mary had a way of making me feel seen. She'd pause in the hallway to ask, "How are your classes going?" or gently remind me, "Don't forget to submit your tuition reimbursement," as the semester wrapped up. The support, motivation, and empowering environment at OPPL made a lasting impact, one I'll always carry with me. While working towards my degree, I applied for and completed an internship with Jesse Blazek, the Director of Palos Heights Public Library (PHPL).

Once a month, on a Wednesday afternoon at OPPL, Room 104 fills with the sound of excited children's voices, and bilingual Arabic stories and songs that teach about shapes, manners, colors, etc. Bilingual Arabic Storytime has become more than just a monthly event, but also a space for community connection. With the support and mentorship of Alex, I learned how to bring books to life, either bilingual stories or translating popular English titles into Arabic and blending them with songs and games. Our voices are filled with drama and excitement, and the characters' emotions can be heard down the hall by Patron Services. Monthly attendance ranges from 50 to 70 attendees, and more than 300 people join us each year for our special Ramadan and Eid celebrations. On February 25, 2025, over 300 attendees gathered for the "Ready for Ramadan" program to celebrate the beginning of Ramadan! We offered patrons a build-a-mosque craft, a variety of games, and, of course, six storytime sessions. The highlight of the event was our storytime sessions on the picture book *Ilyas & Duck- Ramadan Joy!* by Omar S. Khawaja. The children's laughter, along with the many who returned to hear the story again, made the evening truly unforgettable, particularly the young patron who joined me as a backup singer, harmonizing with the sounds I created.

One of the most cherished moments in my journey happened during my internship at PHPL, when I led my very first Bilingual Arabic Storytime, "Welcome Ramadan." With the support and encouragement of Tina Ruszala, the Youth Department Manager, I planned and delivered the entire program on my own, welcoming 30 attendees. I still remember the joy and curiosity on the children's faces as we read an interactive Ramadan picture book together. Afterward, we made crafts that celebrated the holiday, and the session ended with a mini-Ramadan parade through the library, visiting different departments. The sound of children's laughter echoing through the halls made it all feel magical. To gain insight into storytime, Tina assigned me to observe storytime sessions for ages birth to preschool with reference librarians to learn the different techniques, styles, and approaches. During my observations with Youth Librarian Carla Dinnocenzo, she advised "repetition," with welcome songs, nursery rhymes, and interactive play to build vocabulary and language skills, enhance memory, and foster a comfort zone. One year later, on February 28, 2025, my second "Welcome Ramadan" Storytime program at PHPL saw a significant increase in attendance, doubling the numbers from the previous year, with 70 attendees.

Leading my Bilingual Arabic Storytime on my own was a turning point. It wasn't just about reading books or planning activities, it was about connecting community members, creating joyful memories, and discovering my voice as a future librarian. Tina's encouragement helped me realize that I was capable of so much more than I had imagined. In September 2024, I was offered a position as a Youth Assistant at PHPL and began offering Bilingual Arabic Storytime, a monthly 30-minute session that includes storytelling, crafts, music, and interactive play. At PHPL, storytime quickly gained admiration from parents and community members. Within minutes on the opening day of registration, Bilingual Arabic Storytime fills with a waiting list. A typical Arabic Storytime session starts with a welcome song that includes my name, 'Ahlan wa Sahlan…,' giving every child a chance to introduce themselves as parents sing along and clap. The children playfully dance with egg shakers and scarves, surrounded by floating bubbles. I often include storytelling paired with activities like finger play, puppets, bubble time, a fun parachute activity with nursery rhymes translated into Arabic, and hands-on crafts, ending with social, interactive play for both children and parents.

One of the most valuable aspects of hosting Arabic Storytime is receiving feedback, whether it's comments, suggestions, or expressions of gratitude. I love hearing what resonated, what could be improved, and what families would like to see next. Their input has invited me to take initiative, be creative, and learn through experience. I have been invited to contribute in meaningful ways, whether it's creating programs, curating Arabic children's materials, or designing crafts in the vibrant makerspace. The youth librarians at PHPL have shared valuable tips on overcoming challenges and creating a fun, engaging storytime. One piece of advice that resonates with me is, "It isn't a performance, but rather an interactive experience."

Providing Bilingual Arabic Storytime at Orland Park and Palos Heights Public Libraries is essential for promoting cultural inclusivity and awareness, supporting language development, building community connections, fostering literacy, and enhancing cultural understanding to meet the diverse needs of children and families. Creating these wonderful programs for our community members requires a dedicated team effort. The supportive work environment at both libraries has played a crucial role in my growth, encouraging professional development, fostering collaborative teamwork, and inspiring innovation and creativity, all of which have been invaluable in guiding my work with Bilingual Arabic Storytime. **ILA**

LIRA
Libraries of Illinois Risk Agency

Premiere Library Insurance Program
Owned and Operated
by Illinois Libraries

For More Information:

https://qr1.be/79S9
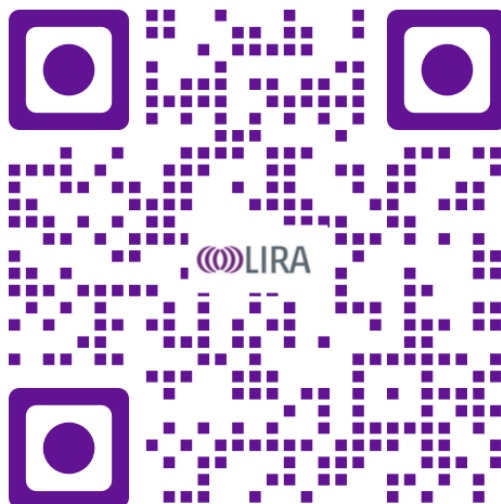
Trevor Smith	**Ali Sulita**	**Marcus Henthorn**
Account Executive	Client Service Manager	Area Executive VP
630.694.5436	630.438.1633	630.694.5152
trevor_smith@ajg.com	ali_sulita@ajg.com	marcus_henthorn@ajg.com

The Creative Journey of Hatem Aly

From the bustling streets of Cairo to the quiet corners of New Brunswick, Canada, illustrator Hatem Aly has navigated a path as dynamic and expressive as the artwork he creates. Born and raised in Egypt's capital, Aly moved to Canada in 2007 and brought with him a passion for visual storytelling that has since flourished in the world of children's literature.

"I've been drawing and making up stories–mostly comics–since I can remember," Aly says. Despite a lifelong interest in art, he didn't always see illustration as his destined career. "It didn't feel like a calling. I was still figuring out what I could do in life."

He studied fine arts but remained unsure of where it would lead. Although he didn't grow up with picture books, comic books deeply influenced his understanding of visual storytelling. Over time, small illustration projects and personal experimentation sparked a deeper love for the craft. "That's when I fell in love with it and wanted to do more. Yes, please."

Relocating to Canada from Egypt meant starting his career over. Aly sent countless emails, postcards, and agent submissions, with limited success. "My income was so low that I began to consider something other than illustration," he recalls. But finally, his persistence paid off.

He attended the Bologna Children's Book Fair with a group of fellow Arab illustrators, an experience that would lead to more visibility and, eventually, representation by his current agent. A turning point came when he was selected to illustrate the 2017 Newbery honor title–*The Inquisitor's Tale* by Adam Gidwitz. "Everything came together," he says. "The rest came naturally."

Aly's creative process begins with ideas–many at once that are often scribbled hastily. "There's a lot of thinking and problem-solving required to make the illustration work," he explains. Rough sketches on paper are transferred to digital platforms for refinement. He incorporates scanned art and textures to give his illustrations an organic, tactile feel.

Aly tries to make art almost every day. "I draw most days," he states, though not all sessions are productive. "Some days I want to, but nothing good comes from it. Other days, I'm frustrated–and then I discover something that works." His go-to personal materials include pen and ink, but he's increasingly experimenting with watercolor, gouache, and mixed media-some of which you can see explored in his art for iREAD.

Aly's illustrative work includes *The Proudest Blue, The Unicorn Rescue Society, Yasmin*, and *You Are a Star, Jane Goodall*; his range is impressive. But there's no rigid formula for choosing or approaching a new project. "The most basic reaction I want is to be excited to work on the book." He reads deeply into character-driven stories and lets emotion guide his choices.

Each new book requires discovering the style that suits it best. "Sometimes your go-to style feels like listening to your own recorded voice," he laughs. "So I try to change things up depending on the tone."

In 2022, Aly served as a mentor in the Highlights Foundation's Muslim Storytellers Fellowship–an experience he hadn't anticipated. "I applied hoping to be mentored," he remarks, "and instead I was invited to be a mentor myself!" The opportunity was deeply meaningful. Living in a small Canadian town, Aly sometimes struggles to find an artistic community who fully understands his perspective. The fellowship provided a space for shared experience and mutual support. "Having a safe space to just be–and a sense of community where we can grow together–is so important." As a result, he continues to keep in touch with the people he met during the fellowship.

Aly's recent work for iREAD's 2026 program *Plant a Seed, Read* allowed him to explore themes of community, nourishment, and imagination. "Books, farming, food, growing veggies and plants, and of course animals!" he says of the concept. "I wanted to convey mutual generosity–a sense of feeding, reading, and community, all with a touch of mild fantasy."

What would his dream project be? To write and illustrate his own books. "That is the dream!" he states, though balancing work, family, and life is no small task. "I'm working on better self-management, and I hope it won't be long."

Aly has fond memories of libraries in Cairo, even if summer reading programs were unfamiliar. He reminisces, "Libraries have this magical vibe–I could stay there for hours." A few early encounters stand out, including a librarian gently correcting his pronunciation of a book title and a challenge from a young child about reading English novels.

As a kid, Aly loved Arabic folktales, including *Kalila and Dimna, 101 Nights,* as well as the stories of Hans Christian Andersen. Today, his reading spans children's books and adult nonfiction, from *Tasting the Sky* by Ibtisam Barakat to *The Grammar of Fantasy* by Gianni Rodari.

Aly's bio mentions "more pets than people"–a fact he confirms. The family shares their home with three cats, two rabbits, two birds, and three fish tanks. "They keep us busy for sure," he says, "but they're sweet after all–and could be inspiring!"

Aly hopes to keep evolving. "I want to create and work to get better with every project," he says. And someday soon, he hopes to write and illustrate multiple books–maybe even a graphic novel.

To fellow creators and artists, Aly offers a parting note of encouragement: "Please leave some window for frustration. It's absolutely normal and will pass. Just keep living, creating, and caring." **ILA**

| Rachel Ferrier, Naomi Kufel, & Ruairi McEnroe, Champaign Public Library |
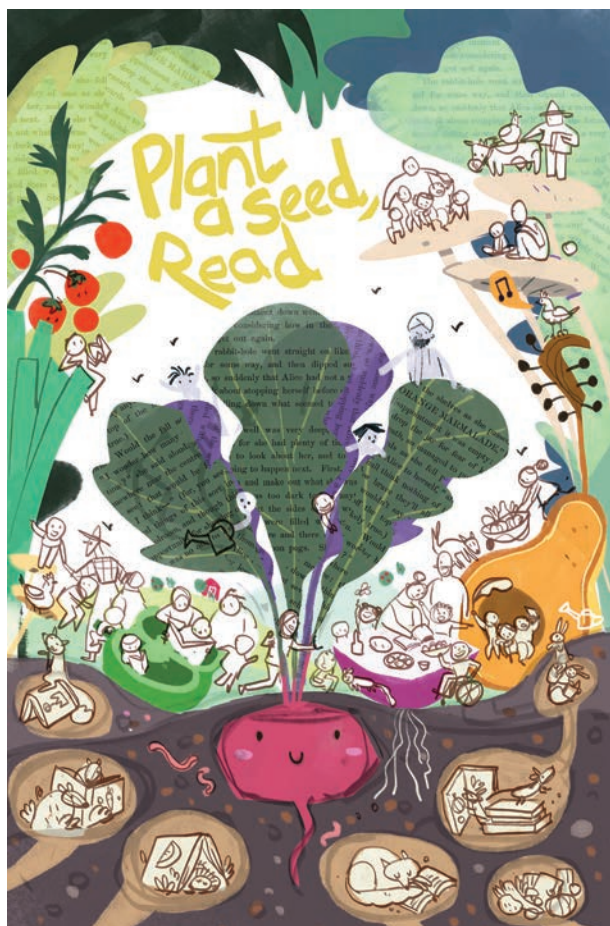
Your Next Great Read Starts Here: Readers' Advisory at the Champaign Public Library

Champaign Public Library has a lot to offer our patrons these days–from meeting rooms to public computers to programs for all ages–but there is still an overwhelming demand for the things that made libraries famous: *books*. Our customers regularly ask for help to find their next read, and while we've been making great recommendations all along, we decided that we needed to freshen up our approach to readers' advisory. Enter the RA Working Group.

We started a conversation in a Teams channel titled "Talking Books;" all library staff members, regardless of department, were invited to join. It was–and still is–a place to share interesting book news, including adaptations we're excited about (or not), awards lists, new releases by favorite authors, and of course a recurring thread where we discuss what we're reading.

A regular in-person meeting came next, evolving from a library-wide genre study created by Technical Services Manager Nanette Donohue. The genre study, one of countless activities put on hold by the pandemic, reconvened in 2022 with a series of meetings on different types of mystery novels (Golden Age historical, police procedural, cozy mysteries, etc.). Library staff members from all departments were invited to read a mystery book of their choice and then discuss it with the group, book club style. During the conversation, we considered aspects like character development, pacing, mood, and other appeal terms– the exact elements that you might use to help a patron articulate what they're looking for in their next book.

The RA Working Group now includes folks from our Collections and Technical Services Team, as well as our Access Services (circulation) and Adult Services departments. Staff from our branch library, the Douglass Branch, also periodically attend meetings, which occur once a month for an hour before the library opens. And while other departments aren't often able to be there in person, staffers from Administration, HR, and Children's Services regularly participate in the "Talking Books" channel.

One of our regular agenda items is brainstorming ways to continue growing and promoting our readers' advisory services, including our Book Match service, which provides patrons with book recommendations via email after they fill out an online form. They give us a few details about their interests, and we crowdsource ideas for 3-5 titles (along with the reasons our team recommends them). Customers are delighted by the service (and the quick three-day turnaround) and often reply to tell us so.

Our group also regularly uses NoveList's online readers' advisory training as a resource. For example, several staff members participated in the Actively Anti-Racist Service to Readers course, which gave us a great foundation for recommending a broader range of titles and authors from our diverse collection. We also serve as library-wide advocates of readers' advisory, sharing tips and useful resources and encouraging other staff to get involved. Even if it's something as simple as replying with a title suggestion to a Book Match request or responding to a "What are you reading?" thread, we believe that anyone can gain valuable experience in readers' advisory by participating in the discussion.

One of the most ambitious activities our group has done to date was a special breakout session for our 2024 Staff Development Day. Three members of the RA Working Group, Arianna Wasik, Naomi Kufel, and RK Knaur, presented tips and tricks for recommending books based on a variety of appeal factors and gave participants a chance for some hands-on practice. This session became the foundation of their presentation at Reaching Forward South this past April, where they expounded upon their process of executing improvisational readers' advisory. The talk, titled "Facing the Dragon of Indecision," focused on not only equipping library staff across departments with recommendation tools, but also assisting patrons in overcoming their own uncertainty in navigating library resources.

One of the key aspects of the presentation was demonstrating that you don't have to read every book yourself in order to recommend them. There is admittedly some judging a book based on its cover–you can often tell whether a book is a thriller vs. a romance vs. a fantasy based on cover art, for example–but you can also look at blurbs, reviews, and other resources to clue you in on whether it might be what your patron is looking for. We've also established a list of genre "experts" among staff at the Champaign Public Library; that way we can crowdsource recommendations from folks who might be more familiar with certain types of books.

In an age where digital media can often overshadow the joy of reading, our staff has a passion for connecting with patrons and we strive to make each recommendation unique. Our goal has been, from the inception of the RA Working Group, to make readers' advisory accessible to everyone in the library world, no matter your job title or level of experience. Why? Besides the fact that talking about books is fun, we think that everyone benefits from keeping lanes of communication open and active between library departments. We are connecting by sharing our knowledge, along with our excitement for books, movies, audiobooks, and podcasts. Our hope is that this service will continue to grow and adapt to reach our patrons, who will come to see us as a trusted source for book recommendations along with the vast array of other resources that they depend on us to provide. **ILA**

| Bradley J. Wiles, Northern Illinois University |

Teaching the Infodemic in Real Time

Over the past two decades, the rise of social media, mobile web technologies, and an increasingly online culture have presented a seemingly intractable professional crisis for librarians, archivists, and others working in the information fields. We are living through the latest and arguably the most intense iteration of the Infodemic. But what is the Infodemic? The term–a portmanteau of information and epidemic– was coined earlier this century to describe issues associated with information provision during public health crises, when misinformation and disinformation spread with exponential speed throughout populations and complicated efforts to mitigate disasters. It has since been understood and applied more widely to describe a generalized Information Age malady characterized by the pervasive influence of digital information technology in all aspects of personal, institutional, and social activity. As the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated, the cognitive dissonance caused by the various manifestations of the Infodemic have serious implications for citizenship, human rights, democracy, and the physical and mental well-being of a hyper-connected global community.

What are we to do as information professionals? A common response has been to redouble our efforts to promote information literacy in the various venues available to us. To this end, during the Spring 2025 semester I taught an undergraduate course called "The Infodemic: Misinformation, Disinformation, and Conspiracy Culture in the Information Age, 1945–2020" as part of the Northern Illinois University Honors Program. The course was developed around the program's 2024–2025 multidisciplinary curricular theme of "Reality and Fantasy," and emphasized the importance of critical thinking and analytical skills needed to successfully negotiate an information technology-saturated environment. In addition to learning how to identify and understand some of the primary components of the Infodemic and their impact on contemporary society, students were exposed to scholarly literature and other resources describing various dimensions of this phenomena.

The course focused on some of the primary vectors of the current Infodemic, namely misinformation, disinformation, propaganda, and conspiracy theories. There are many other possible Infodemic elements that were touched upon throughout the course (i.e. censorship, intellectual freedom, copyright, algorithmic bias, etc.), but I was most interested in those four because they seem to have incited the greatest amount of anxiety due to what they potentially mean for control and agency over our lives, livelihoods, and institutions. They are certainly among the most sensationalized in the public imagination, because the threat they pose is real, even if the extent of that threat is mostly never realized in its worst forms. But besides that, misinformation, disinformation, propaganda, and conspiracy theories work so well together–they are complementary and mutually reinforcing.

> "Misinformation, disinformation, propaganda, and conspiracy theories work so well together– they are complementary and mutually reinforcing."

My instruction was partially aimed at helping students develop strategies for mitigating the effects of the Infodemic on their media and information consumption and decision-making, while also giving them the tools to critically assess information sources. Most importantly, my instructional strategy was to encourage students to relate their own experience of the Infodemic in real time, which coincides with the politically and socially tense conditions these young people have known their entire adult lives. The Infodemic course students were tasked with four main learning objectives:

• Identify and critique some of the primary components and characteristics of the Infodemic and the impact these have had on different aspects of contemporary society.

• Analyze and articulate historical factors, political implications, and techno-cultural dimensions of the Infodemic's development, evolution, and attempts to manage it.

• Develop and implement strategies for mitigating the effects of the Infodemic on their own media and information consumption and decision-making.

• Critically assess information sources and information ecosystems for scholarly utilization, especially writing about complex subjects.

The course was divided into three thematic units that provided the conceptual and definitional foundation of the Infodemic, examined specific historical instances and sociocultural contexts of its main components, and considered its impact on modern democracies and information communication technologies. Although the course was grounded in Information Studies, I employed a multidisciplinary approach that incorporated ideas, theories, and readings from History, Psychology, Political Science, Communications and Media Studies, Philosophy, and Popular Culture Studies. I used multimedia sources where possible and was able to line up several article authors and other subject matter experts as guest speakers to discuss their work or the weekly topic. There were several recurring concepts that emerged throughout the course including information abundance, overload, and entropy, the notion of subjective, objective, and normative truth, and epistemology (how we know what we know) in relation to cognitive authority—or who and what we as individuals choose to trust for second-hand information and knowledge about the world.

Because this course was originally designed as a graduate LIS seminar, I had to adjust some of the readings and course materials, but I felt comfortable making a basic assumption that some of the students would have at least passive experience with or knowledge of the Infodemic that they could relate to, even if it was likely they would not be acquainted with the underlying concepts or related scholarship. My main expectation was that the students be willing to entertain ideas and perspectives that they may not agree with or even find ridiculous, allowing for exploration that they may not get in other required courses. The lessons were delivered through interactive lectures and discussions, and assignments included weekly forum posts and a scaffolded term paper on the student's choice of topic.

The main information literacy assignment was a Group Analysis Project, where students were assigned to groups to work on a semester-long writing and source analysis exercise using a generative AI program. Each group created a 1,000-1,500 word essay on a topic related to some aspect of the Infodemic. Their instructions to the AI application required that the essay incorporate and cite the sources it used to compile the essay content. Groups then checked the veracity of the essay and tracked down the sources to determine whether they were truthful, authoritative, and credible using a methodology of their choosing to analyze the content, structure, and meaning of the generated essays (SIFT, CRAAP, PROVEN, etc.). One of the course meetings featured a lesson with a librarian colleague looking at ways to map different analytical methods to the ACRL Information Literacy Framework. Students then organized their findings into a critical report and presented as a group on the AI tool that was used, the analytical approach employed, and any other findings or observations about how these types of technologies fit within the larger notion of the Infodemic.

Most students seemed keen on maintaining a position of measured skepticism, while trying not to slip into a state of paranoid cynicism. As they learned in the course, an Infodemic of some type has always been with humans since we developed language, and our ability to comprehend it, worry about it, and mitigate it, is constantly refreshed through subsequent waves of information communication technology development. The students are not intimidated by this latest wave of technology in a way that older generations are. They are also open to new ideas and really took to the notion of cognitive authority, especially as it relates to trust. Students were encouraged to always think about who they allow to enter and remain within their sphere of cognitive authority, and for several students this seemed far more important than any information literacy instruction or methods, government regulation, or industry safeguards, because it actually makes people think about who they should and should not trust. It also helps one discern between fact and opinion, what is a compelling argument vs. what is complete nonsense, and what is a reasonable standard of evidence that might change one's viewpoint on a given topic.

With the Group Analysis Project and the other assignments, the students detailed significant levels of exposure to the Infodemic and a commendable awareness of the ways it has affected their lives. Several students demonstrated a receptiveness to the various strategies and methods that the LIS profession has developed to mitigate the Infodemic but expressed uncertainty over their efficacy in the long run. Because when it comes down to it, information literacy instruction is often limited to circumscribed audiences and it is very difficult to assess its impact, especially when the susceptibility to and reach of the Infodemic is nearly universal. After all, most people believe in some conspiracy theory, most of us are more than willing to accept propaganda that goes along with what we already believe, we have all likely shared disinformation of some variety, and sometimes we are just wrong about what we say and write.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the COVID-19 pandemic loomed large in the students' experience. Their writing and the group discussions on this topic were among the best and most meaningful activities of the course. A lot of it was heartbreaking: family disagreements over vaccinations or masking; isolation from friends and social activity during these formative years; living lives more intensively online within a protective bubble that was both physical and virtual, then being thrust back into an environment that no one could guarantee was any safer or better. For them, the pandemic and its fallout *is* the Infodemic, and it will shape their existence in ways we will not be able to fully comprehend for many years to come. All the issues of information consumption, technology, democracy, and the future were bound up in these communications, and I can only imagine how I would react if I was in their position–shifting into adulthood at such a contentious historical moment.

However, I can confidently say that I am not worried about them. They will all be fine and I think they will see in their lifetimes, even with all of the challenges and complexity, something approaching an equilibrium and stability that seems so tenuous in the present. Their experience of the Infodemic will form the basis of their resilience. I see our role as information professionals and the role of information literacy as essential to building social trust on that foundation of resilience wherever we can, but this is an uphill battle: it is difficult to stay informed, it is hard work to change minds, and it is impossible to reach everyone. But where there is trust, there is hope, so we must ask ourselves: how do we approach and apply information literacy in ways that inspire trust? How do we help ensure this carries forward beyond our initial and fleeting points of contact with those bringing us into the future? **ILA**

Misinformation typically refers to inaccurate information that is generated, shared, and spread mostly unintentionally.

Disinformation is intentionally false or misleading information that is created and distributed to exert influence or stir confusion.

Propaganda is deliberate and systematic, usually consisting of information campaigns to effect a desirable outcome.

Conspiracy theories are explanations of events based on or featuring a conspiracy, usually focused on uncovering secretive plots and hidden motivations of powerful forces exerting control from behind the scenes.

| **Alissa Janchenko,** New Lenox Public Library |

Yes, And…
Improv at the Library

IMPROV TRAINING FOR FRONTLINE STAFF? YES (AND!)

When most people hear the word "improv," they typically have one of two reactions: either resounding enthusiasm to get to play games like they've seen at Second City or on the popular show *Whose Line is it Anyway?*, or a cold dread akin to being spotted by a hungry lion.

Both of these groups can benefit from incorporating improv games and training into staff development–and even better, might actually enjoy the process.

WHY IMPROV FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE?

The whole basis for improv is to start from an open-minded place, despite how unfamiliar a situation can be. For library frontline staff, the varied cornucopia of patron interactions is a breeding ground of opportunities to use "yes, and…" The improv games that are listed below can be used with staff who work on multiple fronts. They help utilize active listening, mindfulness, and intentional attitude shifting from being immediately defensive to receptive and responsive. The real trick of "yes, and," though, is in the details–you can say "yes" to a person and "no" to an idea. Boiled down to its simplest form, it is about hearing people and showing up the best way you can.

That's not to say there are no additional rules, or that the occasional vehement "no" is not only welcome, but necessary. Just like performing live improv in front of an audience requires each actor to set and respect boundaries, customer service relies on the social contract of following basic rules (policies and procedures are your friends, folks). Improv gets people more comfortable with thinking on their feet, a fantastic skill to have when interacting with the public. There's also a lot of value to be found in being uncomfortable–improv helps participants feel more at ease with the unknown. Every time you handle a new situation, you are creating new neural pathways, and training your brain to look for new solutions. A *Psychology Today* article from 2021 cites a study that found that doing improv, even as a novice, literally impacts your brain by increasing your "window of tolerance" and driving the nervous system to "self-organize towards integration and balance." Not only can this benefit adults in the workplace, but it can help students with nervous system regulation as well!

HOW IMPROV HELPS WITH TEAM BUILDING

Laughter is one of the quickest ways to form a bond with other people. In an article for Berkeley's *Greater Good* magazine, social psychologist Sara Algoe states that "shared laughter signals that they see the world in the same way…perceived similarity ends up being an important part of the story of relationships." By using improv games as icebreakers during department meetings, or as training exercises during staff development days, you aren't only honing customer service skills–you're empowering team bonding. Several improv exercises require good teamwork such as using listening skills, supporting from the sidelines, or looking out for one another.

USING GAMES IN TRAININGS

So, the whys of using improv are many–but how? Listed below are a couple of the games Yes&: Training and Consulting uses during staff enrichment time. They are designed to be adaptable to your needs and the needs of your organization. Small groups tend to work best for these activities, and typically six to ten people in each group is about perfect. These games can be done sitting, standing, around a table, as an icebreaker during a meeting, for two minutes, or for an hour–completely up to you!

IMPROV GAMES FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE

Questions Only

This game is played by breaking your groups into two lines, with the first person in each line coming forward to participate. They are given a scene location (library, for example) and must conduct the entire scene using only questions–while still making the scene make sense. When one of them makes a statement, takes too long to respond, or gives up, the next person in line takes their place and the scene continues. For added fun, you can have the rest of your participants "buzz" the player out.

Example:

Person 1: Where are the books on turtles?
Person 2: Do you want wild or domestic?
Person 1: Is there a difference?
Person 2: Yes
Audience & other participants: BUZZZZZZ

This continues until you get through both lines of participants.

Some notes: the moderator can change the location if they feel the need and this can be done in smaller groups without an audience.

One Word Story

This game can be played in a group of any size or ability level. The rules are simple–build a cohesive story with each participant only able to add one word (compound words, hyphenations, etc. at the discretion of the moderator) at a time. Punctuation does not count. The larger the group, the harder this one gets, because it is a listening game.

Example:

Person 1: Once
Person 2: Upon
Person 3: A

Though simple in rules, this one tests people–every group has the person who spends the round thinking of the best, most ridiculous or highest brow word to use, and completely loses the listening and collaborating portion of the game. Just like in life, in this game, we need the people who are willing to step up and be the "the" people when they really want to be the "supercalifragilisticexpialidocious" people.

Alissa Janchenko is the Youth Services Manager of the New Lenox Public Library, the founder and Managing Director of Limestone Stage Community Theatre, and offers more in depth sessions as part of Yes&: Training and Consulting. Visit alissajanchenko.com to find out more.

REFERENCES:

• Drinko, Clay. "New Research Highlights the Brain-Boosting Benefits of Improv." *Psychology Today*. March 30, 2021. https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/play-your-way-sane/202103/new-research-highlights-the-brain-boosting-benefits-of-improv.

• Suttie, Jill. "How Laughter Brings Us Together." *Greater Good*. July 17, 2017. greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_laughter_brings_us_together.

ILA

ILA Welcomes New Members

On behalf of the ILA community, Executive Board, and staff we would like to welcome our recent new members. We hope as a member of ILA you contribute, grow, and thrive within the library profession and the ILA community; and support ILA's continuing efforts to create and promote the highest quality library services for all people in Illinois.

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

Knowledge Exchange LLC, Franklin Park

INSTITUTIONAL MEMBERS

Coulterville Public Library, Coulterville
Hanover Township Library, Hanover
Sun River Terrace Public Library District, Sun River Terrace

TRUSTEE MEMBERS

John Baker, Naperville Public Library
Katrina Bromann, Reddick Public Library District
Sandra Cortez, Midlothian Public Library
Barbara Dunn, Wood Dale Public Library
Nicci Krebasch, Wood Dale Public Library
Christopher Lowe, Batavia Public Library
Siobhan McCullough, Cary Area Public Library
Kristy Norris, Wood Dale Public Library
Laura Paley, Lisle Library District
Lynette Reynolds, Midlothian Public Library
Raymond Schwarzkopf, Oak Lawn Public Library
Sharon Silverman, Olive-Harvey College
Lena Sparacio, Wood Dale Public Library
Julie Szabo, Wood Dale Public Library
Ella Whitehead, Skokie Public Library
Lynn Zaremba, Wood Dale Public Library

STUDENT MEMBERS

Riley Aldridge, West Peoria
Aliyyah Bolden Cunningham, Mount Prospect
Jessica Buttell, Wheaton
Jody Cornelius, Lindenhurst
Joseph Davison, Sullivan
Kathia Gorostieta-Reyes, Elgin

Tracy Hanson, Elgin
Joanna Kulma, DeKalb
Jaidyn Smith, Champaign

PERSONAL MEMBERS

Sidney Allen-Simpson, Elmwood Park Public Library
Joshua Altshuler, Illinois State University
Katelyn Boucher, Gail Borden Public Library District
MC Brickell, Chicago
Ana Brown, Steger-South Chicago Heights Public Library District
Cailín Cullen, Aurora Public Library District
Maureen David, Marengo Union Library District
Carrie Dean, Eisenhower Public Library District
Carla Dinnocenzo, Palos Heights Public Library
Tara Donnelly, Chicago
Jameson Ghalioungui, Glenview Public Library
Amy Henkels, Ela Area Public Library District
Suzanne Jones, Antioch Public Library District
Catherine Lantz, University of Illinois Chicago
Dennis Latimer, Marengo Union Library District
Kathleen Leaf, Woodridge Public Library
Becca Maree, Bourbonnais Public Library District
Joy Matteson, Benedictine University Library
James McAdams, Gail Borden Public Library District
Ethan Mikolay, Aurora Public Library District
Ricardo Rodriguez, Rebecca Crown Library, Dominican University
Adam Roloff, Southern Illinois University School of Medicine
Diana Sykes, Erikson Institute, Chicago
Sarah Taylor, Illinois Heartland Library System (IHLS)
Penny Touhy, Marengo-Union Library District
Kasandra Trejo, Evanston Public Library
Crystal Ulen, Marengo-Union Public Library District
Jackie Wells, Camargo Township District Library
Leslie Wood, St. Elmo Public Library District

Level Up At Your Library in 2025: iREAD Roundup

More than 1,600 libraries in over 40 states, plus all Department of Defense base libraries worldwide, and libraries in Australia, New Zealand, and Bermuda participated in iREAD® in 2025, themed *Level Up at Your Library*. Play is one of the ways we learn to relate to others, to think in new ways, and to foster friendships, new and old. *Level Up at Your Library* is an all-ages summer reading program based around puzzles and games. Whether you're playing with STEM concepts or gamifying your reading logs, learning to play chess or how to code video games, iREAD 2025: *Level Up at Your Library* reminds us that libraries are not just a space for knowledge, they are a space for fun!

Begun in 1981 as an Illinois-only partnership among youth services librarians in the state, iREAD® (the Illinois Reading Enrichment and Development [iREAD] program) has grown to include formal or partial statewide adoptions well beyond our borders, including Alaska, California, Connecticut, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Oregon, Rhode Island, Washington, and the Northern Lights Library System in Alberta, Canada. For 2025, we welcomed New Hampshire and the Southwest Kansas Library System. Last but certainly not least, we have added Louisiana as a state partner and look forward to working with them for summer 2026. *Laissez les bons temps rouler!*

In 2025, libraries decorated their spaces; we saw libraries transformed into life-sized board and video games. Libraries welcomed Reading Dragons and their collectable cards (with exclusive art from Carey Pietsch) to their summer programs. We saw multiple *Level Up* floats in summer parades. We looked for Gordon—have you seen him? As always, the most magical part of the program is seeing all of the ways that libraries interpret the theme and implement the program in a way that is a reflection of their community.

We thank Maisie Iven 2025 iREAD® chair, and their committee for their hard work to develop and implement this year's theme.

And coming soon—iREAD® 2026: *Plant A Seed, Read*. The 2026 store will open this fall. Don't forget that ILA Institutional Members receive the downloadable Resource Guide, upon request, for free as part of their membership. Get ready to grow!

ILA

Algonquin Area Public Library District

Elmhurst Public Library

Flagg-Rochelle Public Library District

Princeton Public Library

Four Star Public Library District

Walnut Public Library District

Paris Carnegie Public Library

Itasca Community Library

Watseka Public Library

Mt. Zion District Library

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

Want to see your name in print? Earn a publication credit?
Explore current issues in librarianship? Consider writing for the *ILA Reporter*!

Here's what we're looking for:

- Articles that explore an issue, rather than promoting a particular initiative or program, with examples from more than one library or type of library

- Writing that considers a "how to think about…" approach rather than "how to do…"

- Submissions from all geographic areas of the state

- Submissions that relate to ILA's strategic goal area of a culture of diversity and inclusion, both in the profession and the association

ILA
Illinois Library Association

View submission guidelines at **www.ila.org/publications/ila-reporter** and consider sharing your ideas! Send submissions to **ila@ila.org**.

UNLOCK THE BENEFITS OF ILA INSTITUTIONAL MEMBERSHIP!

Join the Illinois Library Association (ILA) as an Institutional Member and take advantage of exclusive benefits designed to support your library's growth, advocacy, and access to essential resources.

WHY JOIN?

Legislative Advocacy

- Representation in Springfield and Washington, D.C.
- Updates on critical library issues
- Participation in legislative meetups

Affinity Programs & Discounts

- Savings on insurance through LIRA
- Access to the Fund for Illinois Libraries for tax-exempt contributions
- Free Amazon Business Prime Membership for public libraries

Exclusive Resources & Publications

- Discounts for conferences and events
- Complimentary iREAD Resource Guide and iREAD grant opportunities
- ILA awards, grants, and scholarships

TO LEARN MORE: SCAN CODE OR EMAIL ILA AT ILA@ILA.ORG

Bluesky: @illibraryassoc.bsky.social

Facebook: @ILlibraryAssoc

Instagram: @illibraryassociation

Linkedin: illinois library association

Get Ready for Summer 2026:
Plant a Seed, Read

PLANT A SEED, READ

Artwork ©2026 by Pete Oswald and Jory John for iREAD®

Artwork ©2026 by Hatem Aly for iREAD®

Artwork ©2026 by Wendy Xu for iREAD®
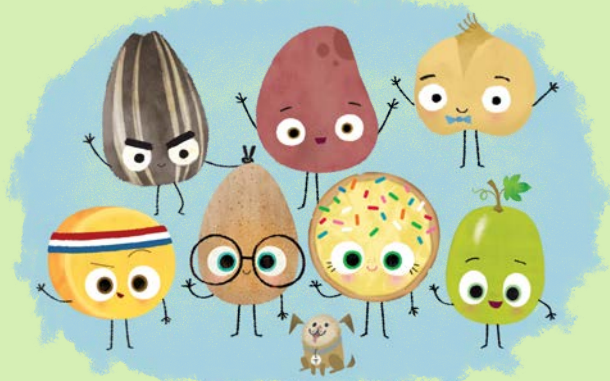
Plant a Seed, Read, and all associated materials
©2026 Illinois Library Association.

iREAD® READING PROGRAMS

REMINDER: ILA Institutional Members receive a complimentary
downloadable Resource Guide upon request.

Artwork ©2026 by Sarah Ferone for iREAD®

TBS

Garners Platinum Awards Across Our Industry-Leading Solutions for Libraries

2025 MODERN LIBRARY AWARDS
PLATINUM AWARD

Today's Business Solutions, Inc.

ePRINTit SaaS

EasyBooking
MyPC
PaperCut MF LIBRARY EDITION

ScanEz

TBS 9900 KIOSK

PLATINUM

Thank You for your continued trust and support.

ePRINTit SaaS
Simplified Mobile Printing

ScanEz
Scan To Everything

EasyBooking
MyPC
Streamlined Computer Reservations

PaperCut MF LIBRARY EDITION
Smarter Print Management

POINT OF SALE SYSTEM
MAGNA POS-L FOR LIBRARIES
Transform Any PC
Complete POS Solution

TBS 9900 KIOSKS
Secure Payments Made Simple

DISCOVER OUR AWARD-WINNING SOLUTIONS AT WWW.TBSIT360.COM

TBS
TODAY'S BUSINESS SOLUTIONS, INC.

7820 S QUINCY STREET
WILLOWBROOK IL 60527

Indicates 2025 Award-Winner

INFO@TBSIT360.COM
PHONE: 630-537-1370