

Abstract

The Great Stories Club is a thematic reading and discussion program developed to reach at-risk youth through literature-based library outreach programs. The activities presented in this proposal will build on work undertaken with support from a previous NEH implementation grant (awarded 2015) and a subsequent NEH planning grant (2016), expanding the number of libraries that participate in the GSC program model, rolling out new and highly relevant reading lists and humanities discussion resources, and engaging more teens who face difficult circumstances with accessible and appealing books selected by literature scholars. These GSC programs will facilitate in-depth exploration of humanities themes that resonate with reluctant readers who are struggling with complex issues like incarceration, violence, poverty, and addiction. The project will connect new participants to a proven, highly successful national program model first launched by ALA in 2006, while providing an increased level of support for outcomes-based program evaluation.

Nature of the request

The American Library Association (ALA) is requesting an NEH Community Conversations grant in the amount of \$397,255 for support of the Great Stories Club (GSC), which directly supports one of NEH's areas of interest, reaching underserved audiences. The GSC is a three-part, thematic reading and discussion program series developed to engage at-risk teens and other underserved audiences through literature-based library outreach programs. With support from NEH, GSC programs will introduce more than 7,000 young adults facing difficult circumstances to accessible and appealing literature selected by humanities scholars with a special interest in reaching the underserved; facilitate in-depth exploration of humanities themes that will resonate with participants; and connect libraries, community organizations, and teens to a proven, highly successful national program model first launched by ALA in 2006.

Program participants will explore curated collections of books with themes that address interpretations and implications of empathy ("Empathy: The Cost of Switching Sides"), concepts of heroism ("What Makes a Hero? Self, Society, and Rising to the Occasion"), and the coming of age experience for youth from historically marginalized groups ("Growing Up Brave on the Margins") through works of fiction, graphic novels, memoirs, and non-fiction books as well as training opportunities developed by a team of humanities scholars and programming librarians.

GSC programs will be conducted by libraries of all types that are located within or working in partnership with organizations that serve at-risk young adults, including alternative high schools, juvenile justice organizations, homeless shelters, foster care agencies, teen parenting programs, residential treatment facilities, and other nonprofit and community agencies. Participating libraries work with small groups of 8-11 teens, provide three theme-related paperback books for each participant to keep as their own, and convene opportunities for exploration and discussion of relevant humanities content among peers. Discussions are led by an experienced youth programming librarian, often in cooperation with staff from a partner organization or department, such as teachers and counselors. See **Attachment 3: Project Walkthrough** for further program details.

The three themes that will be explored through the GSC have been developed collaboratively by project scholars Anna Mae Duane, Associate Professor of English at the University of Connecticut; Maria Sachiko Cecire, Director of Experimental Humanities and Assistant Professor of Literature at Bard College in New York; and Susana M. Morris, Associate Professor of Literature, Media, and Communication at the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta. The themes are designed to appeal to the personal experiences of at-risk youth, introduce them to character-based literature that will validate their reality and emotions, and inspire discussion of universal themes in a way that will contribute to positive changes in how they manage problems, approach future challenges, and engage with their fellow classmates and others. The program also seeks to introduce reluctant and nonreaders to the transformative

The Great Stories Club: Reading and Discussion for At-Risk Youth

power of literature, reduce feelings of depression and isolation, create empathy and tangible knowledge of other people's lives, and establish inroads to public libraries and other vital community organizations that will help them take control of their lives in the future. This program brings the best of the humanities – reading books and participating in thoughtful discussion – to young people who may never have thought about the humanities or taken pleasure in reading.

Humanities content

In preparation for this proposal, ALA worked closely with a [GSC national advisory group](#), including literature scholars, programming librarians, creative artists, and past GSC project participants. Group members worked collaboratively on content development from January – June 2017 with support from an NEH planning grant, coming together for an all-day meeting at the Brooklyn Public Library in February, then continuing content development virtually. Résumés for the advisory group members who will work on the proposed project have been included in **Attachment 5**.

After considering theme suggestions from librarians who hosted GSC programs with readers in 2015-2017, each of the three literature scholars on the GSC advisory group developed a thematic focus for a new series, providing the series name and authoring an essay (up to 3,500 words) for use by program conveners and moderators, in order to:

- position the series and related titles in a humanities context;
- identify issues and larger questions for discussion, interpretation, and supplemental program focus;
- provide a useful tool for local discussion facilitators as they prepare for these reading and discussion sessions in their individual settings;
- illuminate the reading selections and the order in which they should be read in the context of the theme; and
- provide background for each text, the author, and/or the issues explored, within the context of the theme.

Scholars were also asked to select up to six books (three required titles for the core collection, and up to three additional books for optional series expansion) supporting the theme that, when taken as a series, feature protagonists of both genders; are relatable to by teens of different genders; reflect multiple cultural, socioeconomic and/or ethnic backgrounds; and convey different experiences, challenges, and solutions that reflect the theme. Per criteria developed by past GSC project advisors, books selected:

- are or will be available in paperback in advance of program implementation;
- are approximately 300 pages in length;
- have strong read-aloud quality;
- are likely to provoke group discussion;
- should encourage personal reflection;
- are of high literary quality and well-reviewed in professional journals;
- are especially appropriate for reluctant readers (13-19 years old; some older audiences may also choose to participate) and likely to be considered pleasure reading; and
- ideally, are available in a recorded format to support use by participants with particularly low literacy skills.

During the grant term, grantee libraries, partner organizations, and program participants will receive paperback books, in-person and online training, and print and online resources to convene reading and discussion series on the following themes. Additional information about themes and book selections has been included in **Attachment 3: Project Walkthrough**.

Theme 1 (awarded to 75 libraries): “Empathy: The Cost of Switching Sides”

Developed by Anna Mae Duane, Associate Professor of English at the University of Connecticut, in collaboration with GSC literature scholars and programming librarians

Empathy has been held up as a balm for our divided society by everyone from neuroscientists to primatologists to political thinkers. Yet as the consensus grows that we need to cultivate more empathy, the scarcer it seems to become. From political debates, to cultural choices, to classroom conversations, we seem increasingly unable to engage in empathetic exchange. Instead, we pick sides and dig in against perceived enemies.

Recent studies have made the case that literature is perhaps our greatest resource for developing empathy; as authors push us to inhabit the lives of their characters, we find ourselves a little less likely to retreat behind the walls of our own moral certainty. The books chosen for this series complicate that equation: each text encourages readers to explore the power of empathy, but also helps us understand why empathy can be so hard to come by. Each text invites the readers to, in the words of Joyce Carol Oates, “slip ... into another's skin, another's voice, another's soul.” They also confront readers with the dangers of feeling — and acting on — another's pain.

Empathy can be considered the emotional corollary to the Golden Rule: “do unto others as you would have done to you.” As useful as this model can be, it assumes that our own feelings are a good metric for judging the feelings of others. According to the Golden Rule, what I want (what I would want “done unto me”) must be what anyone else would want. What I find pleasurable will also be pleasurable for others. But what happens when our feelings and experiences don't align with those of others'? How, if at all, do we feel for each other without simply imposing our own expectations on everyone else?

The reading list shows required titles marked with an asterisk (*). Libraries may also opt-in for one or more titles on the expanded list:

- **Flight* by Sherman Alexie
- **Kindred: A Graphic Novel Adaptation* by Octavia Butler, Damian Duffy (adaptation), John Jennings (illustrations)
- **All American Boys* by Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely
- *Stuck in Neutral* by Terry Trueman
- *March: Book Three* by John Lewis and Andrew Aydin, illustrated by Nate Powell

Theme 2 (awarded to 75 libraries): “What Makes a Hero? Self, Society, and Rising to the Occasion”

Developed by Maria Sachiko Cecire, Director of Experimental Humanities and Assistant Professor of Literature, Bard College, NY, in collaboration with GSC literature scholars and programming librarians

Legends, literature, media, and history are full of stories about heroes who rise to the occasion in moments of need, taking on great risk for the good of others. What makes a person able to perform heroic acts? Is this something that certain people are just born with, or does it grow out of our circumstances and upbringing? Related to this is the essential question of how much control we actually have over our own self-making. Major thinkers have debated these questions for centuries, and individuals continue to grapple with them as they face down the challenges — sometimes seemingly small, other times impossibly large — of everyday life.

The books in this series each take a different view of what it means to be a hero, considering how the combination of unique social circumstances, compassion for others, and inner resources can make it possible for young people to perform acts that they may not have imagined themselves capable of achieving. At the same time, these texts explore the conditions that create the need for heroism, probing the underlying social problems that can lead to oppression, discrimination, and even genocide. Rather

The Great Stories Club: Reading and Discussion for At-Risk Youth

than serving as a simple celebration of heroism, each book acknowledges the psychological pressures of taking on the responsibilities of a “hero,” and considers the costs and benefits of both individual and collective action.

The reading list shows required titles marked with an asterisk (*). Libraries may also opt-in for one or more titles on the expanded list:

- **Black Panther: A Nation Under Our Feet, Book 1* by Ta-Nehisi Coates and Brian Stelfreeze
- **Maus II: A Survivor’s Tale: And Here My Troubles Began* by Art Spiegelman
- **Binti* by Nnedi Okorafor
- *Code Talker* by Joseph Bruchac
- *What Can’t Wait* by Ashley Hope Pérez
- *How I Live Now* by Meg Rosoff

Theme 3 (awarded to 75 libraries): “Growing Up Brave on the Margins”

Developed by Susana M. Morris, Associate Professor of Literature, Media, and Communication, Georgia Institute of Technology, in collaboration with GSC literature scholars and programming librarians

Growing from a child to a teenager to a young adult usually involves several rites of passage. While these events vary from culture to culture, they usually include educational milestones, parties that celebrate maturity, and special responsibilities that reflect newfound trust from one’s community. These moments can be both scary and exciting. Young people are not navigating these pivotal moments in a vacuum. Indeed, they are sometimes figuring out their morals, values, and increasing independence while living in societies that do not always value their newfound voices.

This circumstance is drawn into particularly sharp relief for young people in historically marginalized groups. Not only do they have to figure out all the “normal” stuff that comes with growing up, they must do so with the added burden of negative social pressure. Under these extra societal pressures, young people of color are forced to perform a type of high-wire act requiring more than the usual intelligence or even pluckiness; courage, bravery, and sometimes even heroism are required.

Growing up brave on the margins of society means moving forward in the face of fear and daunting circumstances. The books in this series feature strong protagonists who rise to challenges and fight for justice in the face of parents who may not always understand them, peers who doubt them, and communities who dismiss them or even find them dangerous.

The reading list shows required titles marked with an asterisk (*). Libraries may also opt-in for one or more titles on the expanded list:

- **Ms. Marvel Volume 1: No Normal* by G. Willow Wilson and Adrian Alphona
- **The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas
- **March: Book One* by John Lewis and Andrew Aydin, illustrated by Nate Powell
- *Shadowshaper* by Daniel José Older
- *X: A Novel* by Ilyashah Shabazz and Kekla Magoon
- *The Sun is Also a Star* by Nicola Yoon

Project formats

ALA will complete four major project activities through the Great Stories Club, engaging audiences and enhancing understanding of the humanities among project participants and the public at large. Where applicable, information about funding has been included.

1. **Implementation grants to libraries:** The GSC will provide 225 collection and resource grants to libraries during a 24-month term, supporting a minimum of 675 discussion programs, gifting 9,400

The Great Stories Club: Reading and Discussion for At-Risk Youth

books to at-risk young adults, and reaching at least 7,000 teens (estimate based on program attendance reported during previous rounds of grantmaking). Funding requested from NEH will support two rounds of GSC grants; funds requested from the Ford Foundation will support one round of grants. Additional information has been provided in **Attachment 3: Project Walkthrough**.

2. **Training opportunities to connect humanities scholars and librarian advisors to local project directors and outreach partners:** During the GSC grant term, ALA will extend in-person and online training opportunities to librarian project directors and their partners, particularly outreach librarians who have formed new partnerships in order to begin providing specialized service for at-risk youth. Training opportunities will connect local program directors with members of the project's national advisory committee, allowing opportunities for connection to national project scholars. Project scholars will also convene by web conference quarterly, for ongoing planning and content refinement purposes. These connections will foster a deeper exploration of the humanities content of each GSC series and of best practices for implementing successful series from experienced programming and outreach librarians.
3. **Author/artist visits with teens:** ALA is seeking funding from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) for an ArtWorks grant to provide participating youth with access to some of the inspiring authors whose work has been included on the GSC reading lists. With NEA funding, ALA will provide travel and artist fees for young adult authors to visit with 10 libraries selected to participate in the GSC program, and additional artist fees to support Skype-based programs with other participating sites. Participating teens will have the opportunity to hear a reading by the author, discuss the author's work with the author, and participate in a writing or journaling workshop led by the author. ALA most recently received an NEA grant to support the Great Stories Club during 2016-2017, bringing appearances with Jay Asker (*Thirteen Reasons Why*), M.K. Asante (*Buck: A Memoir*), and Nate Powell and Andrew Aydin (*MARCH* trilogy) to hundreds of teens in alternative schools and juvenile detention facilities.
4. **Evaluation of program effectiveness:** With assistance from a third-party evaluator (to be funded by and selected in consultation with the W. K. Kellogg Foundation), ALA will develop and implement an in-depth evaluation plan in order to better understand the immediate and longer-term impact on young adults who participate in GSC reading and discussion programs; the effectiveness of different types of literature in inspiring meaningful reflection and dialog; and the progress that the project has made in further establishing specialized library programming for at-risk youth as a national priority.

Project resources

The following project resources will be used during a GSC implementation grant. Examples of many are available from prior rounds of this grant program; new materials to support current themes and reading lists will be refined by national project advisors during the grant term. For examples of the resources created for past GSC series, see <https://apply.ala.org/greatstories/resources>.

Books and audiobooks: Working with its colleagues in the publishing industry, ALA will manage procurement and distribution of book collections (see pages 3-4 for titles) for each GSC series. Each library selected for a GSC grant will receive a 33-piece set including 10 paperback copies of each title to be gifted to teen participants, and one paperback copy for use by the discussion leader and inclusion in the library's collection. At the recommendation of the GSC national advisory group, ALA will also allow libraries to opt-in for up to three additional thematically related titles, and/or expanded collections for larger groups of teens of up to 25. All titles gifted to libraries will come with supporting resources, including discussion questions developed by literature scholars.

The Great Stories Club: Reading and Discussion for At-Risk Youth

On behalf of participating libraries, ALA will also negotiate the lowest possible pricing on purchase of additional copies of print and audio editions, to provide an opportunity for low-cost program expansion with local support. In the past, the publishing community has been especially supportive of the GSC program, offering generous discounts of more than 65% off retail. Many participating sites were successful in securing local support from Library Friends groups as well as corporate and nonprofit funders, which increased the number of young adults served through the program.

Program planning resources: Each library will receive access to online program planning resources developed by the project team. Resources will include suggestions for conducting community outreach and recruiting local program partners; a press kit including sample press releases, social media posts, and PSAs for program promotion and fundraising; reporting forms, budgeting forms, and other materials. Supplemental programming resources will include lists of related books, films, recordings and other publications to support further exploration of the theme (e.g., during discussion of *MARCH*, program attendees may wish to listen to the [podcast 99% Invisible's episode about The Green Book](#), a travel guide for African-American motorists to avoid towns after sundown during the Jim Crow era, as well as [browse The Green Book guides](#) via library digital collections). Materials will be available on the GSC project website at <https://apply.ala.org/greatstories> as well as via www.ProgrammingLibrarian.org, and promoted widely for use by other libraries seeking to host GSC programs with local funding.

Discussion resources: During the grant term, ALA will work with project advisors to provide host sites with a variety of discussion resources. These include ideas for icebreaker activities, sample ground rules for productive and civil discussion, statements of humanities themes for use developing supplemental programming, and title-specific, open-ended discussion points to support in-depth conversation about the selected literature. Librarians and scholars with specialized experience convening discussions in lock-down, therapeutic, and recovery environments will develop best practice documents and a bibliography of supporting print and online resources. Discussion resources developed for each GSC series will be provided to library host institutions via a project website, webinars and workshops, and published on ProgrammingLibrarian.org for ongoing use.

Audience recruitment materials: ALA will provide online access to professionally designed, customizable, and downloadable resources for use with GSC program participants. Resources will include bookmarks, related reading brochures, discussion group sign-up sheets, certificates of completion, and promotional posters and flyers. These materials are used by libraries and partner organizations to encourage participation in the GSC program, further engage participants with the library and reading in general after series completion, and motivate and reward teen participants for their involvement.

Webinars and workshops: Training opportunities for librarian project directors and their local program partners will include the following.

Orientation workshops

A 1.5-day orientation workshop will be hosted for each round of GSC grantmaking. Orientation workshops will take place in Chicago across the street from the ALA offices, at St. John Episcopal Cathedral Commons which offers ALA discounted space and AV. Presenters at the workshop will include project scholars, librarian advisors, and ALA Public Programs Office staff.

An agenda for a past NEH-funded GSC orientation workshop has been included in **Attachment 9: Supplementary Material**. Workshops for new themes in this proposed project will follow a similar format, covering the topics below.

*The Great Stories Club: Reading and Discussion for At-Risk Youth***Morning Session**

- Introduction to the project goals for encouraging reading and engagement in the humanities among underserved audiences
- Review of the project theme and related works, presented by project scholar
- Discussion of the biographies of each GSC author included on the reading list, the role that writing played in their lives, and other memoirs that may be considered for extended programming
- Review of the program format and the humanities content to be included in each program; suggestions for other programs
- Discussion of best practices for moderating discussion with teens, convening a successful program series in partnership with other stakeholders (e.g., teachers, counselors, probation officers), and logistics for working in secure facilities

Afternoon Session

- Best practices for conducting community outreach to establish new partnerships focused on reaching at-risk youth with literature-based library programs
- Collaborating with teachers, counselors, and other youth mentors on planning and program implementation
- Program promotion and publicity, including methods and materials, targeting special groups, and audience retention

ALA will also offer a pre-workshop webinar, addressing the following:

- GSC support materials – overview of project website and resources
- Local fundraising: who can help; who should be approached
- Identifying speakers: finding scholars, authors and other content experts
- Overview of reporting and evaluation requirements

Planning workshops have been very successful for previous GSC series. Librarians and scholars are enthusiastic about meeting others who will be developing programs for the same project. They stay in contact with one another, exchange ideas and resources, and in general, help to make the project successful for everyone involved. An electronic e-mail discussion list dedicated to the project will be available through ALA for librarians and their partners.

Orientation webinars

In addition to in-person orientation workshops, ALA will host pre-application online training for library applicants and their partner organizations. These webinars will provide opportunities to pose questions to national project scholars and present best practices for convening a successful series by librarian project advisors. Each webinar will be 60 minutes in length, allowing time for participants to interact virtually with presenters. Webinars will be recorded and archived, for later use by prospective applicants who were unable to attend the live event.

Project history

In 2006, ALA piloted the Great Stories Club with funding from Oprah's Angel Network. Programs were conducted by 180 libraries in partnership with alternative education programs, juvenile justice facilities, residential treatment facilities, and youth outreach organizations. Over 2,000 young adults participated.

With continued funding from Oprah's Angel Network, ALA offered 1,000 GSC grants on four additional themes through 2011, reaching 670 libraries in 49 states and more than 30,000 young adults (12-21). The program ended in 2011 after the funding organization was dissolved.

The Great Stories Club: Reading and Discussion for At-Risk Youth

In 2015, ALA received a \$350,000 grant from NEH to support implementation of three humanities-based GSC series: “Hack the Feed: Media, Resistance, Revolution”; “The Art of Change: Creation, Growth, and Transformation”; and “Structures of Suffering: Origins of Teen Violence and Suicide.” Cash and in-kind support for project activity was also provided by the ALA Cultural Communities Fund, the Ford Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the 200 libraries that hosted programs in their communities. Since 2015, 125 libraries have implemented these GSC programs, and another 75 will complete their programming term on September 29, 2017. To date, libraries have reported hosting 848 discussion programs with attendance of 7,674 teens, as well as 238 supplemental programs (e.g., writing workshops, poetry readings) with attendance of 2,526 teens.

In January 2017, NEH awarded a planning grant to ALA to convene an advisory group for development of the three themes outlined for implementation in this proposal. Between January and July 2017, the advisory group worked collaboratively on development of themes, reading lists, essays, discussion points, and supplemental resources. ALA procured collections for nine pilot libraries that are currently offering the new series to teens in a diverse range of institutional settings in Alaska, California, Colorado, Massachusetts, Michigan, Illinois, Texas, and Virginia. Feedback from pilot libraries will be considered as resources, training materials, and workshop agendas are developed during the implementation term.

During administration of the Great Stories Club, ALA continues to see that specialized library programming for at-risk youth is desperately needed but enormously under-resourced in terms of financial support, staffing, training resources, and professional development opportunities. According to Jennifer Sweeney, author of *Literacy: A Way Out for At-Risk Youth* (Libraries Unlimited, 2012), “providing access to books and reading for detained youth is perhaps one of the last true frontiers in library service. ...library service to juveniles in detention is still in its infancy.”

ALA receives regular requests from libraries interested in GSC programming, and many past participants are very enthusiastic about the opportunity for future support presented by this NEH implementation grant.

Audience, marketing, and promotion

Eligibility: Eligible libraries and partner organizations include alternative high schools and classrooms; juvenile detention facilities and programs; residential and out-patient treatment programs; group and foster homes; public housing, shelters, and transitional housing complexes; and other youth outreach organizations such as those serving teen parents. During the proposal process, libraries will have an opportunity to describe the population they seek to target with a GSC series, and make the case for why this population is at-risk or underserved. All proposals must be targeted to serve audiences aged 13 and older.

Target audiences: During the implementation grant phase, ALA’s primary target audience will be programming librarians and community organizations that are eligible to present a GSC series. Our goal will be to reach these constituents to promote local partnerships focused on program implementation and service to at-risk youth, and to encourage proposals. With each of three rounds of grants that ALA will administer, we will attempt to attract an increased number of proposals, continue supporting the growth and sustainability of successful GSC series, and encourage new outreach partnerships.

ALA’s secondary target audience will be the young adults and others who participate in local GSC programs hosted by libraries and their partners. Based on past GSC series, we expect to reach audiences that are diverse in race, cultural background, ethnicity, age, gender, and educational and economic levels through a wide variety of settings. For example, although the program has been developed for youth aged

The Great Stories Club: Reading and Discussion for At-Risk Youth

13-19, ALA received and funded proposals from organizations looking to serve older adults who were incarcerated, or working to improve literacy and life skills in a variety of settings.

Marketing: To target its primary audience, ALA will reach out to the hundreds of past GSC project directors to solicit proposals, post information about grant opportunities to relevant ALA units and groups, and utilize third-party mailing lists to reach libraries and organizations outside its membership. ALA will invite applications from all types of libraries in the U.S. and its territories through electronic e-mail lists, the library press, and selected mailings. Each online application will be featured prominently on the ALA Public Programs Office web site, ProgrammingLibrarian.org, and promoted through other ALA divisional publications such as *Public Libraries* and *American Libraries*. The Public Programs Office anticipates high interest in this project because of its history, popularity, and its uniqueness as a national model for library programming for at-risk youth.

Libraries and partner organizations that participate in the GSC will pursue their own marketing efforts, using resources provided by ALA (see page 6: Audience Recruitment Materials). Depending on the host institution and the target population, local efforts may focus on audience recruitment and retention, or on seeking support from other internal departments (e.g., English teachers, guidance counselors, creative writing instructors) or local agencies (e.g., youth outreach organizations, academic institutions).

Promotion: ALA will promote the GSC program model and resources during and beyond the grant term, encouraging local adaptation and implementation by sites not involved in national implementation efforts. Content developed with support from an NEH implementation grant will be shared widely with the library and non-library community alike, via ala.org, ProgrammingLibrarian.org, and third-party organization websites, newsletters, and other publications.

Libraries will also undertake promotional efforts intended to raise the visibility of the library and/or partner organization's mission and services, and to pursue fundraising to expand or extend the GSC program.

Evaluation of impact

Through telephone interviews, email messages, site visits, reader surveys, written reports from librarians and other GSC program conveners, and third-party evaluation, ALA Public Programs Office project staff will assess the impact of the Great Stories Club.

Attention will be given to evaluating program content including books, essays, and discussion points; training resources including programming guides, webinars, and workshops; new partner development and coordination with community agencies; demographic reach of the GSC program; impact on participants; and efforts to attract local funding for program expansion or continuation. Evaluation efforts will include the following.

Library reporting: The GSC has been a flagship ALA young adult programming model since 2006, and was implemented in 200 libraries with NEH funding in 2015-2017. During the nine years that the GSC program has been implemented, ALA found that this simple but effective, affecting, and popular model brought about many important outcomes in the lives of individual participants. Via final reports collected from participating libraries, the following project outcomes have been identified and reported by grantees:

- engaging youth facing difficult circumstances with powerful works of young adult literature
- affirming the importance of youth voices in cultural discourse
- connecting humanities concepts to personal experiences
- encouraging reading among non-readers
- facilitating probing discussions of intellectually stimulating humanities questions

The Great Stories Club: Reading and Discussion for At-Risk Youth

- affirming participants' beliefs in their intellectual capacities
- offering emotional benefits by reducing feelings of depression and isolation
- encouraging empathy through peer-based discussion groups
- facilitating reflection and discussion of past actions and future opportunities for positive change inspired by the books
- contributing to improved literacy
- improving attitudes toward reading
- inspiring avoidance of future negative behaviors and outcomes in the lives of participants

The GSC program has also made a positive impact at the institutional and community level by:

- establishing important connections between at-risk teens, their public library, and their local librarian, as well as local nonprofits that are important to success after incarceration, treatment, and graduation, and during other transitions
- prioritizing specialized, literature-based library programming for underserved groups
- providing a curated collection of literary programming resources for future use
- increasing library use during and after the project term

Through the proposed project, ALA will use the GSC program model to achieve and improve on the above outcomes, reach new audiences, and offer access to new thematic content developed by literature scholars for use by programming librarians and others beyond the grant term. Library final reports will be summarized, and the success or failure of project goals will be analyzed in a final project narrative report to the NEH.

Reader surveys/Research project: In 2016, a three-page reader survey was developed by Allison McKim (Associate Professor of Sociology, Bard College, see **Attachment 5** for Dr. McKim's résumé and letter of commitment, which describes the focus of her research) in cooperation with Maria Sachiko Cecire (GSC national project scholar, Bard College) and ALA staff. It was cleared for an exemption and waiver of consent by IRB Solutions Ltd., and has been shared with libraries for distribution to teens following completion of each book in their GSC series. Participating libraries upload completed reader surveys to their ALA final report, and results are currently being considered for a white paper to be published in 2018. The findings from this effort will inform refinement of the reader survey to be used during the 2018-2020 project term, as well as project activity more generally. Dr. McKim will serve as a research advisor during the proposed project term, guiding refinement of the survey instrument, and managing data processing and analysis with support from an intern at Bard College.

Third-party evaluation: ALA will work with an external evaluation consultant, yet to be named, on the development of survey instruments to most effectively measure program impacts. ALA will ask that the evaluator work with ALA to determine whether the GSC project has altered the professional discourse on library service to at-risk youth by undertaking an assessment of member- and staff-driven conference session proposals, and reported activities at conferences, in professional publications, and via online publications and forums.

Organizational profile

The **American Library Association** (ALA) is a nonprofit educational organization of more than 56,000 librarians, library school students, educators, trustees, and institutions with an annual operating budget of approximately \$50 million. The Association's mission is to provide leadership for the development, promotion, and improvement of library and information services and the profession of librarianship in order to enhance learning and ensure access to information for all. The ALA has eight Key Action Areas that serve as guiding principles for directing the Association's energies and resources, and these include Education and Lifelong Learning, Equitable Access to Information and Library Services, and Literacy.

Since its founding in 1876, the ALA has encouraged and sponsored many humanities programs in libraries that engage the public in consideration of important ideas and issues. In 1992, ALA established its **Public Programs Office (PPO)** to promote cultural and community programming as an essential part of library service. Through professional development activities, programming resources, model programs, and grant opportunities, PPO supports libraries as they fill their role as community cultural center, a place of cultural and civic engagement, where people of all backgrounds gather for reflection, discovery, participation, and growth. Since 1992, the ALA Public Programs Office has attracted more than \$30 million in private and federal support for library programming, offered more than 60,000 grants to libraries, and reached tens of millions of library program attendees.

Project team

ALA project staff: Staff members of ALA's Public Programs Office will be responsible for the following aspects of the project:

- coordinating the work of the project advisory committee to meet deadlines for design and production of project materials, and to develop content for online and in-person training opportunities for librarian project directors;
- negotiating price and procuring books for distribution to libraries, for their use administering discussion programs and gifting to teen participants;
- implementing a public relations campaign, including national promotion, participant recruitment materials for local programs, and ALA and Programming Librarian websites;
- hosting an online application system to facilitate proposal submission, review, and final reporting for three rounds of GSC grants to libraries;
- recruiting peer reviewers and overseeing proposal review process;
- overseeing production of promotional materials and program planning resources;
- distributing grants (books, printed support materials) to library sites;
- organizing and hosting training workshops and webinars;
- facilitating travel and housing reservations for librarians;
- coordinating communication among libraries and the project team throughout the project concerning programs and other issues;
- collecting final reports from libraries;
- managing a third-party project evaluation; and
- writing performance and financial reports for NEH.

Lainie Castle is a project director in the ALA Public Programs Office, and has served in this role since 2007. During that time, she has managed a portfolio of more than \$10 million in private and federal grant funding, leading development and implementation of national library initiatives including the Great Stories Club, StoryCorps @ your library, Latino Americans: 500 Years of History, and NASA@ My Library. She received a BFA in theatre from Illinois Wesleyan University, and an MLIS from Dominican University.

Sarah Ostman is the communications manager in the ALA Public Programs Office, where she oversees promotion of PPO programs and edits the website ProgrammingLibrarian.org. Previously, Sarah worked as a communications writer and editor at Northwestern University and as a journalist for various outlets in Illinois and California. She received a BA in sociology and theatre from Smith College and an MA in journalism from Columbia College Chicago.

Erik Cameron is the director of data applications in the ALA Public Programs Office. Erik is responsible for Public Programs Office web infrastructure, including the development of all online grant and exhibition applications. Prior to joining the Public Programs Office in 2009, Erik spent eight years in

The Great Stories Club: Reading and Discussion for At-Risk Youth

Internet services and Unix systems administration, and three years working in academic publishing. He holds a BA in philosophy from Reed College.

Brian Russell has worked as a program coordinator for the ALA Public Programs Office since 2012, providing administrative support to a range of projects including Libraries Transforming Communities, Thinking Money, and the Great Stories Club. Brian graduated Magna Cum Laude from Loyola University Chicago in 2012, with a BA in literature and anthropology.

Humanities scholars and consultants

National advisory committee: The project advisory committee will convene via an online meeting space at the beginning of the project, and will review, refine, and approve final versions of all project materials. These will include the final thematic essays for local discussion group moderators; final annotated reading lists (core and supplementary); final humanities discussion points for each of nine core titles and up to nine additional titles; a GSC programming guide; and proposal materials (guidelines, application form, and review criteria). The advisory committee will work collaboratively to establish final agendas for national orientation workshops and webinars. Scholars will develop presentations that focus on the project's humanities themes and how to emphasize them in local programs; librarians will develop presentations that offer guidance on strengthening outreach partnerships, convening successful programs, and planning supplemental events and lesson plans. Members will also convene quarterly via web conference for ongoing project advisory purposes

Maria Sachiko Cecire (scholar, “What Makes a Hero”) is Director of Experimental Humanities and Assistant Professor of Literature at Bard College in New York. Her areas of specialization include children's literature, medieval literature and its reception, media studies, and cultural studies. Prior to joining Bard's faculty in 2010, she taught at Oxford University. Maria holds a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Chicago, as well as a Master of Studies and a Doctor of Philosophy from Oxford University. Her publications include essays in *Anglo-Saxon Culture and the Modern Imagination*, *Arthurian Literature XXVIII*, *The Journal of Children's Literature Studies*, and *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*. She received a Rhodes Scholarship in 2006.

Anna Mae Duane (scholar, “Empathy: The Cost of Switching Sides”) is Associate Professor of English at the University of Connecticut. She is the author of *Suffering Childhood in Early America: Violence, Race and the Making of the Child Victim* (UGeorgia, 2010); the editor of *The Children's Table: Childhood Studies and the Humanities* (UGeorgia, 2013); *Child Slavery Before and After Emancipation: An Argument for Child-Centered Slavery Studies* (Cambridge 2016), and the co-editor of *Who Writes for Black Children?: African American Children's Literature Before 1900* (University of Minnesota Press, 2016). She is also the co-editor *Common-place: The Journal of Early American Life*. Her essays have appeared in *American Literature*, the *Cambridge History of the American Novel*, *Studies in American Fiction*, and *African American Review*. Her work has been supported by a Fulbright award, as well as fellowships from NEH and Yale's Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition.

Susana M. Morris (scholar, “Growing Up Brave on the Margins”) is an Associate Professor of Literature, Media, and Communication at the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta and co-founder of the popular feminist blog, *The Crunk Feminist Collective*. Susana is the author of *Close Kin and Distant Relatives: The Paradox of Respectability in Black Women's Literature* (UVA Press 2014) and co-editor, with Brittney C. Cooper and Robin M. Boylorn, of the anthology, *The Crunk Feminist Collection* (Feminist Press 2017). Susana is also series editor, along with Kinitra D. Brooks, of the book series *New Suns: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Speculative*, published at The Ohio State University Press. Currently, she is a Digital Integrative Liberal Arts Center Fellow at Georgia Tech working on her latest book project, *Electric Ladies: Black Women, Afrofuturism, and Feminism*.

The Great Stories Club: Reading and Discussion for At-Risk Youth

Anna Cvitkovic (librarian advisor, “Growing Up Brave on the Margins”) is a Teen Librarian with the San Francisco Public Library (SFPL). She runs the library at Log Cabin Ranch, a detention facility for teenage boys within the Juvenile Probation Department, where youth have discovered an unlikely passion for knitting. She also leads library outreach programming for youth experiencing parenting, homelessness, and other challenges, and has developed the first SFPL program specifically for transitional-aged youth (TAY). Anna holds a BA in Latin American and Caribbean Studies from McGill University and an MLIS from San Jose State University.

Allyson Dowds (librarian advisor, “Empathy: The Cost of Switching Sides”) is the Youth Technology Librarian for Teen Central at the Boston Public Library. In this role, Allyson coordinates efforts to bridge the technology gap among urban youth by working with and for youth to identify community partners as well as design and implement a STEAM-based curriculum within and beyond the walls of the library. Prior to this work, Allyson served as a Library Manager in the Massachusetts Department of Corrections, working with both incarcerated men and woman. During her tenure, she established several humanities programs for inmates, including the first Art Group, a family literacy program in conjunction with a local public library, as well as a Poetry Group that was co-convened with a Pushcart Prize-winning local poet. Also, she facilitated a regular reading and discussion program called ABLE MINDS (Altering Behaviors through Literary Exploration and Moderated Inquiry-based Discussion Sessions). Ally holds a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism from Loyola University of Chicago and an MLIS from Simmons College.

Jennifer Mann (librarian advisor, “What Makes a Hero”) is the Teen Librarian for the Ypsilanti District Library. She has been a librarian for the past 15 years, and committed to youth advocacy and social justice issues for the past 25 years, including roles as a classroom teacher, education director, and researcher. As a youth librarian, Jennifer has presented at the Michigan Library Association’s annual conference and spearheaded The Library’s Network (TLN) book drive for the Grace Lee Boggs’ School in Detroit. She has implemented numerous youth and teen programs funded through many grants, including starting a Teen Science Café, a social issues Book Club at an alternative high school, and secured a YALSA grant for technology training for teen interns. Jennifer holds a BA in sociology and social welfare from University of Michigan and an MLIS from Wayne State University.

Allison McKim (research/evaluation advisor) is Associate Professor of Sociology at Bard College in New York. She specializes in gender, punishment & social control, criminology, the welfare state, and ethnographic research. She is particularly interested in the role of gender in the criminal justice system, social policy, and law; the politics of drug policy, and how social institutions try to shape the self. Her new book, *Addicted to Rehab: Race, Gender, and Drugs in the Era of Mass Incarceration* (Rutgers University Press), is an ethnographic comparison of two drug treatment programs for women, one in the criminal justice system and one outside of the penal state in the health care system. Allison's research has also appeared in the journals *Gender & Society* and *Signs*. She teaches courses on gender; sexuality; punishment, prisons, and policing; deviance and crime; governance and the welfare state; drugs and society; and qualitative research.

Work plan

During the 24-month project term, ALA will follow the work plan below.

April 2018

- Project term begins; ALA meets with external evaluator to share project timeline and begin work on an evaluation plan
- First quarterly project advisory team meeting (via web conference)

The Great Stories Club: Reading and Discussion for At-Risk Youth

- Final edits to GSC supporting resources (e.g., essays, discussion questions, activities) are made

April – May 2018

- Guidelines published and online applications opened for Theme 1: Empathy (April 23 – June 1)
- Finalized GSC supporting resources are published on the project website (<http://apply.ala.org/greatstories>)

June 2018

- Applications for Theme 1 close on June 1
- Theme 1 proposals are peer-reviewed; 75 libraries are selected to receive a grant
- Grant notifications, paperback books, and print materials are distributed on June 15

July 2018

- Theme 1 grantees reserve travel/lodging for August workshop
- Guidelines published and online applications opened for Theme 2: Heroes (July 23 – September 10, 2018)
- Quarterly project advisory team meeting (via web conference)
- Revisions to the 2016 GSC reader survey will be finalized, prior to dissemination during the program term

August 2018

- In-person workshop is held for staff from 75 libraries hosting Theme 1 programs, August 9-10 in Chicago
- Evaluation plan is finalized and published on the project website; 2018 evaluator site visits with select libraries are scheduled

August – December 2018

- Theme 1 programming series are hosted in 75 libraries

October 2018

- Theme 2 grantees reserve travel/lodging for November workshop
- Quarterly project advisory team meeting (via web conference)

September 2018

- Applications for Theme 2: Heroes close on September 10
- Theme 2 proposals are peer-reviewed; 75 libraries are selected to receive a grant
- Grant notifications, paperback books, and print materials are distributed on September 28

November 2018

- In-person workshop is held for staff from 75 libraries hosting Theme 2 programs, November 15-16 in Chicago

December 2018

- 2019 evaluator site visits with select libraries are scheduled

January 2019

- Final reports are due from Theme 1 grantees
- Quarterly project advisory team meeting (via web conference)

January – June 2019

- Theme 2 programming series are hosted in 75 libraries

April 2019

- Quarterly project advisory team meeting (via web conference)

June 2019

- Final reports are due from Theme 2 grantees

July 2019

- Guidelines published and online applications opened for Theme 3: Margins (July 15 – Aug. 12, 2019)
- Quarterly project advisory team meeting (via web conference)

August 2019

- Applications for Theme 3 close on August 12
- Theme 3 proposals are peer-reviewed; 75 libraries are selected to receive a grant
- Grant notifications, paperback books, and print material are distributed on August 26

September 2019

- Theme 3 grantees reserve travel for Chicago workshop in October

October 2019

- In-person workshop is held for staff from 75 libraries hosting Theme 3 programs, October 3-4 in Chicago
- Evaluator site visits with select Round 3 libraries are scheduled
- Quarterly project advisory team meeting (via web conference)

October 2019 –February 2020

- Theme 3 programming series are hosted in 75 libraries

January 2020

- Draft evaluator final report due to ALA
- Quarterly project advisory team meeting (via web conference)

March 2020

- Final reports are due from Theme 3 grantees
- Evaluator final report is due to ALA

Project funding

The ALA Public Programs Office will alert state humanities councils of the libraries selected for this project, encourage them to help fund local programming with grants to libraries and/or library partners, and ask that they recommend scholars who would be interested in co-moderating discussion programs. ALA will also work with participating libraries to advise on local fundraising efforts, which have been successful in generating support for supplemental programming (e.g., related social service projects; field trips to museums, plays and other cultural events) in the past. Libraries will report on local matching funds received as both cash and in-kind contributions via their final reports to ALA.

Through a combination of support from ALA's Cultural Communities Fund (\$19,526), the Ford Foundation (\$137,876), NEA (\$24,484), and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (\$104,363), ALA will secure

The Great Stories Club: Reading and Discussion for At-Risk Youth

matching funds/cost share for evaluation efforts, staffing, author visits, books, and workshops. The Kellogg Foundation is currently reviewing a proposal for support of the GSC program, which would provide evaluation support for this proposed project, and the Ford Foundation is reviewing a proposal for support of one round of GSC grantmaking to 75 libraries. Ford and Kellogg funding decisions are expected no later than January 2018, and an NEA decision is expected in April 2018.

Testimonials

Many of the 800+ librarians who have participated in GSC programming attest to the impact that the series had on their constituents. Below is one of the hundreds of testimonials received that articulate the importance of the program. Additional information may be found in letters of support that have been included in **Attachment 9: Supplementary Material**.

“The Juneau Public Library is grateful for [this] Great Stories Club grant because we seek to increase the accessibility and range of thought-provoking and compelling literature available to our incarcerated youth. They are frustrated with life, not doing well in school, dealing with addictions, behind in credits, and are reluctant readers. The titles included in the Great Stories Club address circumstances familiar to our participants, both under and beyond their control. ... A number of rural Alaskan youth relate to urban African American culture and music. Despite the obvious differences, issues related to poverty, addiction, and mental illness are equally prevalent in their lives. Reading about a young man [in *Buck: A Memoir*] who overcame these circumstances through writing inspired reluctant readers and writers to express themselves. ... Many of the students in the GSC are Alaska Native. Moving for placement in treatment facilities has the unintended and detrimental consequence of removing them from their home culture. Junior’s experiences [in *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*] learning to live between two cultures resonated with and inspired the students. Going through changes with the characters of the book helped draw out personal experiences in a non-confrontational way. ... *The Complete Persepolis* brought the world to our discussions. Many of these students are too focused on personal situations to relate to international events. These books made a large and complex issue relatable and understandable. They were surprised by how many of [Satrapi’s] experiences relate to theirs. ... This Great Stories Club cycle was a great success because participants were exposed to new literature and the pleasure of owning their own books. They gained experience and confidence expressing their own ideas about literature and established a lasting relationship with their local public library.” -- Amelia Jenkins, librarian and GSC project director, Juneau Public Library, Alaska