

# With Our Own Words

## Librarians' Perceptions of the Values of Storytelling in Libraries

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Storytelling as an element of programming in American public libraries began in the late nineteenth century as children's librarianship began to take root and children's spaces in public libraries became more prevalent. Much of the library literature, including an exhaustive historical dissertation on the topic (see Alvey, "Historical Development"), credits the 1900 storytelling tour of Marie Shedlock, an English schoolteacher-turned-storyteller, as the major impetus behind the rise of interest in storytelling in library settings (though storytelling seems to have been occurring previously in American kindergartens, having arrived in the United

States with that movement in the late 1870s). Marie Shedlock's storytelling tour struck a deep chord among children and children's librarians of the time. "She really started the art of story-telling as it is now practiced more or less perfectly in most of the public libraries in this country, and began a new movement in library work which has been a boon to millions of people throughout the land" (Anderson, Personal Letter 148).

For nearly forty years, storytelling held pride of place in public library children's programming; however, the extensive time demands that storytelling put on librarians, the explosion of picture book publishing in the 1920s and 1930s, and the subsequent development of preschool story times in the 1950s featuring reading aloud as the principle performance modality, all led to a decrease in public library oral storytelling. The rise of the professional storytelling movement in the United States in the early 1980s gave rise to a new pool of extremely talented storytellers-for-hire, and the change in focus in library higher education to "information science" meant that fewer courses in storytelling were offered to train emerging children's librarians. Whereas storytelling is still frequently offered in public libraries in America, it is less common that children's librarians are, themselves, the performers, though this perspective has been challenged (see Del Negro, "Whole"; Hardendorff, "Storytelling and the Story Hour"). Ruth Sawyer shared this concern in 1958, when she wrote, "This heritage of storytelling is one of our oldest. Lost, it might be hard to regain. Let us not lose it" ("Editorial" 15). The heyday of "librarian as performer of storytelling"—versus "library as location of storytelling"—might, then, be considered 1900 to about 1940. Regardless, librarians have continued to explore in their writing their perceptions of the value of storytelling as a mode of programming, and this research was conducted to determine precisely what those values were and whether they have changed over time.

## Method

The method used in this research was content analysis. Two types of content analysis are considered predominant: quantitative (manifest) and qualitative (latent). Quantitative content is approached by counting occurrences of words and phrases and basing conclusions on these frequencies with the basic assumption that higher frequency words or concepts are more important to understanding

that particular corpus. Qualitative content analysis, as Wildemuth explains, “goes beyond merely counting words or extracting objective content from texts to examine meanings, themes, and patterns” in a text (*Applications* 308). Both methods offer constructive insight about the issues present in any text, and both were used in this analysis, though the emphasis was on qualitative analysis.

Several resources were examined to develop the corpus for analysis. A combined search of the databases Library and Information Source (covering articles from 1900 to the present) and Library and Information Science Retrospective (covering 1905–83) was conducted using the title keywords “storytelling” OR “storyteller” AND keyword “value,” yielding 998 results. The titles and abstracts of all of these results were examined to determine their relevance to public library programming using oral storytelling, and since the word “storytelling” has been applied to anything from literary plotting and style to marketing and management procedures, many of these results were discarded as irrelevant; foreign language materials were also discarded, as were articles focused on storytelling in schools or nonpublic library contexts.

The authors of the remaining articles were then added to those mentioned in Richard Alvey’s 1974 dissertation, “The Historical Development of Organized Storytelling to Children in the United States,” which offered an in-depth overview of historical trends in public library storytelling and provided the names of some of the major figures involved. Further names were added with a search of the University of North Carolina library catalog to find storytelling manuals to form a master list of potential authors to include. Biographies of the authors generated by this combined search technique were then consulted to determine whether any had been a public librarian, resulting in twenty-six public-librarian authors. Despite not being a librarian, Marie Shedlock was also included in this study, as her influence on storytelling programming in public libraries in the United States was so fundamental that excluding her “voice” would be egregious.

Thus, forty-five articles and books by the following twenty-seven authors, listed chronologically by the date of the author’s first pertinent contribution, were included in this study:

1. Anne Carroll Moore (New York Public Library)
2. May G. Quigley (Grand Rapids Public Library, Michigan)
3. John Cotton Dana (Newark Free Public Library, New Jersey)
4. Ida J. Duff (Brooklyn Public Library)

5. Rose Gymer (Cleveland Public Library)
6. Alice I. Hazeltine (Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh)
7. Frances Jenkins Olcott (Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh)
8. Edna Lyman Scott (Oak Park Public Library, Illinois)
9. Alice A. Blanchard (Free Public Library of Newark, New Jersey)
10. Mary Gould Davis (Brooklyn Public Library)
11. Alice M. Jordan (Boston Public Library)
12. Marie Shedlock
13. Elisabeth Nesbitt (Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh)
14. Ruth Sawyer (New York Public Library)
15. Hallie Loomis Craytor (Cuyahoga County Library, Ohio)
16. Effie Louise Power (Cleveland Public Library)
17. Spencer G. Shaw (Brooklyn Public Library)
18. Frances Clarke Sayers (New York Public Library)
19. Eulalie Steinmetz Ross (Cincinnati Public Library)
20. Jane Buel Bradley (Long Beach Public Library, California)
21. Jeanne B. Hardendorff (Muncie Public Library, Indiana)
22. Augusta Baker (New York Public Library)
23. Ellin Greene (New York Public Library)
24. Margaret Read MacDonald (King County Library System, Washington)
25. Elizabeth Huntoon (Chicago Public Library)
26. Kathy East (Wood County District Public Library, Ohio)
27. Janice Del Negro (Chicago Public Library)

The available works of these authors were reviewed to determine whether they address the value of storytelling (rather than just offering suggestions for technique or overviews of storytelling events with no accompanying “values statement”). All quotations expressing a value of storytelling were compiled and analyzed qualitatively for themes. Both researchers coded these independently and then discussed their coding to resolve differences. These quotations were then organized chronologically and analyzed quantitatively using Voyant word cloud software (<http://voyant-tools.org/>) to explore the frequency of key terms and their occurrence across the corpus (that is, changes across time). Whereas there are certainly librarians who have written about storytelling that this method failed to capture, we believe these twenty-seven authors represent the major perspectives librarians have espoused over the last century of library storytelling in the United States.

## Results

The quotations of these librarians fell into three main categories in order of increasing frequency: values for storytellers, values for institutions, and values for children.

### Values for Storytellers

The value of storytelling for the performer was seldom mentioned by these librarians, but when it was, the focus was on this skill as an avenue for personal satisfaction and professional development. Anne Carroll Moore claims that “any form of work that takes assistants out of ruts and sets them to reading and thinking, and talking over what they read in a natural manner is worth considering” (“Storytelling” 412). Ida J. Duff extended this perception to include the delight of the teller, claiming that storytelling “gives pleasure to the storyteller [and] brings her into closer personal touch with the children” (“Story-Telling” 416). Jane Buel Bradley felt this pleasure was the result of “sensing, along with the children, all the wonder of the tale as it unfolds” (“Listening Heart” 677).

In 1943, Effie Power revisited the value of storytelling for the librarian’s career development when she stated, “There is no part of the work that helps more to cultivate and to preserve [the librarian’s] appreciation of literary values than the selection of essential incidents for telling” (*Work with Children* 100); Jeanne Hardendorff reiterated this value twenty years later, but she added that “storytelling imparts to the beginning and experienced storyteller alike clearer and deeper insight into the power of stories” (“Storytelling” 62). In 1957, Eulalie Steinmetz Ross emphasized storytelling’s power to “refresh and broaden and deepen [the librarian’s] knowledge of the books she works with,” and nine years later, she extolled the “deep satisfaction for the storyteller who practices the art and with words and pictures makes literature live for his or her listeners” (“Give Tongue to Literature” 281).

Storytelling, then, has been valued for the benefits it provides to those who tell stories, from providing the wonder of connecting with an audience and revitalizing literature, to motivating librarians to broaden their professional repertoires. The sole public librarian voice of dissent to the value of storytelling for storytellers (though there were other dissenting voices from the educational field and from government librarians) came in John Cotton Dana’s dispassionate comments of

1908, just as storytelling began to find a place in children's services, in which he dismissed library storytellers saying, "If, now, the library by chance has on its staff a few altruistic, emotional, dramatic and irrepressible child-lovers who do not find ordinary library work gives sufficient opportunities for altruistic indulgence, and if the library can spare them from other work, let it set them at teaching the teachers the art of story-telling" ("Story-Telling in Libraries" 350). Whereas his point that storytelling in schools could reach more children than storytelling in libraries was well founded, his tone set off a flurry of responses that helped solidify storytelling as a fundamental part of children's librarianship, much as challenging books tends to guarantee their circulation and success.

### **Values for Institutions**

Librarian storytellers have also explored the values of storytelling for the library as an organization, focusing on increased circulation, improved public relations, and increased use of the children's area in the library. As early as 1905, May Quigley explained that it was "especially interesting to note the effect of the 'story hour' upon the use of the children's room, for those who have heard the stories will come again and bring their friends with them," and she explained how librarians would "note with pleasure the rapidity with which the 'story-hour books' vanish, which were collected and put in a conspicuous place in the children's room" ("Telling Stories to Children" 351). John Cotton Dana noted that story hours facilitate "keeping [children] off the street" and "making friends for your library" ("Story-Telling in Libraries" 349), while Ida J. Duff explained that story hour "forms the library habit [and] increases the popularity of the library" ("Story-Telling" 416).

Anne Carroll Moore claimed that storytelling helps market the library due to the "interest aroused, both inside the Library and outside, among library assistants and their families; children and their parents; school principals and teachers; social workers; and people in general" that would lead to "increasing interest in the work of children's rooms" ("Storytelling" 412). Alice Blanchard noted the effect on circulation, stating, "Library reports show that [storytelling] has interested thousands of children in the library, increased greatly the general circulation of books from the children's shelves, and created popularity for the books from which the stories were selected" ("Storytelling as a Library Tool" 291). Finally, in 2015 Janice Del Negro mentioned the power of storytelling to "connect children [...] to libraries" and to "ease immigrant children into the American mainstream by

connecting them to the public library, a uniquely American institution” (“Whole” 4–5).

This value, however, has not been without challenge. Again, it was John Cotton Dana who doubted the place of storytelling in libraries: “Indeed, the occasional story-telling which the one library of a town or city can furnish is so slight a factor in the educational work of that town or city as to make the library’s pride over its work seem very ludicrous” (“Story-Telling” 349–50).

### Values for Children

The most detailed consideration of the value of storytelling was in its application to children’s lives and well-being. These values clustered into six categories, each of which is addressed below.

#### Books and Reading

Most librarians writing about storytelling have made the connection that oral performance should be used to entice children to read. Augusta Baker claimed that “the storyteller has the pleasant responsibility of leading children to books” (*Storytelling* 19), and Frances Jenkins Olcott was more emphatic in saying, “The main object of our story hour and reading circles *is to draw attention to books and to books only*” (*Rational* 6, italics in original). The focus was clearly on circulating library collections (or “stock” as it was called in the early twentieth century), and storytelling was viewed as an extremely effective method of engendering children’s interest in the books from which the stories were selected: “The primary object of story-telling to children is to [...] cultivate a taste for good literature and direct them to those books which they would not otherwise read if left to themselves” (Quigley, “Telling Stories” 351). This belief was reiterated in several different forms, but the emphasis was always on improving children’s reading habits and “their knowledge of the world’s literary masterpieces” (Dana, “Story-Telling” 349).

Elizabeth Nesbitt believed it to be “the unique function of the library story-teller to use [storytelling] in order to create a desire for the book; it is her privilege to serve as an interpreter between the child and the wealth of centuries” (“Shortening” 835). Ida J. Duff believed that storytelling’s power to excite the imagination, form the library habit, or connect the librarian and the children was “not sufficient justification” to use this method “if it cannot be proved that the

telling of stories actually does lead to familiarity with and love for good literature” (“Story-Telling” 416). Of course, this “proof” was difficult to ascertain; indeed, Ruth Sawyer, in 1958, claimed, “We get a certain satisfaction as well as a sense of accurate values when we measure things. We know what we have and how well they will serve us when we say: a bushel of apples, three yards of woolen cloth, a pound of nourishing food. But what of a story—the telling of it? What of its poundage in educational and spiritual values? Can we prove anything? This year marks my half-century of storytelling, and I can prove nothing by it” (“Miracle” 15).

Still, librarians continued to extol the virtues of storytelling to lead children to books. The perceived reason for this effect differed among librarians. Anne Carroll Moore expressed her perception that “we look upon [storytelling] as an opportunity to give boys and girls a wider range of interests in reading and a higher standard of selection in the books they choose from the circulating shelves” (“Storytelling” 412). Alice I. Hazeltine felt the “development of the power of concentration makes him a more thorough reader” and that “story-telling, rightly used, gives the child a standard by which he may judge other stories, thus contributing to the development of taste” (“Story-Telling” 414). Alice M. Jordan went beyond the library walls in claiming that “educators are seeing in this gift from outside the teaching force the impetus needed to make reading a joy and not a task; they witness frequently, with surprise, a marked improvement in reading ability of which the children themselves are not wholly ignorant” (“Story-Telling in Boston” 184).

Ruth Sawyer focused her argument on reluctant readers: “Storytelling can be used both wisely and helpfully as an approach to books—old familiar books, too often forgotten, and new books, too often lost in the welter of each year’s publication. It may be used more often than one realizes to arouse the enthusiasms of the slow, the lazy, the indifferent reader—that boy or girl who would rather do almost anything else than read a book” (*Way* 165–66). Frances Clarke Sayers addresses struggling readers, claiming, “For the child who finds it difficult to read, storytelling gives assurance of a share in literature, through the glory of the spoken word. He learns by ear to recognize the elements of creative art—originality, style, structure and form, characterization, mood and atmosphere, and the beauty of words” (“Storyteller’s” 102). Ellin Greene reiterated this perspective: “there will be children who are experiencing difficulty making the transition from oral to written narrative [...]. Storytelling allows these children to lose themselves in a

story in the same way that fluent readers lose themselves in a book” (*Storytelling* 34). Rose Gymer focused on the issue of reading that was too difficult for particular children, explaining that storytelling facilitated the “presentation of stories which children have found difficult to read” (“Story-Telling” 417).

Augusta Baker felt the true connection between storytelling and reading was that “storytelling encourages the art of listening [...] [and] listening to stories prepares children for reading on their own. If the stories they hear are worth listening to, they are eager to learn the key that unlocks the symbols. They also learn to follow events in sequence, a prerequisite of reading comprehension” (*Storytelling* 20). In 2014, Del Negro reiterated this stance: “The child who does not take to reading quite so easily needs exposure to language and narrative structure in ways other than through text. Storytelling is the perfect alternative activity because it works with children at all literacy levels” (*Folktales Aloud* 32–33).

Spencer Shaw believed that storytelling was a way to bring literature to life, “to make books a living force” (“I’ll” 68) so that children gained “an appreciation for literature and an incentive to read other stories” (“I’ll” 69). This view was shared by many other librarians who used such descriptions as: “makes literature live for his or her listeners” (Ross, “Summer” 281), “a means of giving life and color to the otherwise quiet pursuit of reading; of bestowing drama on the written page” (Sayers, “From” 2010–11), and “lift it from the printed page, pour the breath of life into it, and make it come alive and be meaningful” (Ross, “Give” 23).

### Character Education

Often the reason for using great literature as the source of storytelling material was the librarians’ desire to improve the lives of children by modeling excellence of spirit that would lead to behavior modification. The morality, nobility, and steadfastness of the story heroes would serve as models of behavior for the children. As May G. Quigley stated in 1905, “we can [...] cultivate the right kind of humor, and impress ethical truths on their minds [...] we can call out the judgment of the child [...] as to the right or wrong of the acts related [...] we can place the children in contact with the best society in every age and nation—with the noblest and purest characters who have adorned humanity” so librarians “ought always to keep before us the fact that we are building character” (“Telling Stories” 351). John Cotton Dana mentioned that storytelling can improve children’s morals; Ida J. Duff explained that it “aids in discipline” (“Story-Telling” 416); Anne Carroll Moore believed it had “practical value in the cultivation of habits of coming and going

quietly, listening with interest, or when that fails with quiet respect for the interests of others" ("Story Hour" 210); and Frances Jenkins Olcott claimed that through storytelling a child's "emotions may be swayed toward good and bad" (*Children's Reading* 40). This emphasis on associating with upstanding characters and giving children the "opportunity for associating with great thoughts and ideals" (Scott, *Storytelling* 49) was particularly effective, according to Anne Carroll Moore, as "a civilizing influence wherever the gang spirit prevailed" ("Report" 299).

The rationale for using storytelling in this manner was that direct, ethical instruction was not the purview of public librarianship, and story was a way to "cloak" the message in excitement and avoid didacticism. As Marie Shedlock explained of stories, "their highest use consists in their ability to enable the child, through suggestion, to form a pure and noble idea of what a man may be or do. The sensitiveness of a child's mind is offended if the moral is forced upon him, but if he absorbs it unconsciously, he has received its influence for all time" (*Art of the Storyteller* 62–63). Story, then, was a way to "counteract some of the sights and sounds of the streets which appeal to the melodramatic instinct in children" (105) and thereby "unconsciously correct evil tendencies in children which they recognize in themselves only when they have already criticized them in the characters of the story" (120). Ruth Sawyer mirrored this perspective, claiming that storytelling helped children "find a universal eagerness toward life and an abiding trust" (*Way* 167), and Mary Gould Davis argued that storytelling provided "a sort of armor against that sense of 'sad defeat' that comes sooner or later to each one of us" ("Story-Teller's Art" 169).

Whereas Olcott was supportive of storytelling so long as its purpose was promoting the collection, she disagreed with character education as a primary purpose: "if the library worker uses story telling as a means of inculcating knowledge or teaching ethics, the story fails to produce public library results and the method becomes the weakest of methods, as it absorbs time, physical energy, and library funds which should be expended to increase good reading" ("Story Telling" 285–86). She did not mean that storytelling was an *ineffective* way to promote character education. Indeed, she claimed that it "helps in the unfolding of [the child's] ideas of right and wrong, and develops his sympathetic feelings; all of which 'by-products' have a powerful influence on character" ("Story Telling" 288); however, when performed with this as its primary intent, it did not satisfy library goals.

This desire to use storytelling to empower children has remained a recognized value into modern times. Margaret Read MacDonald has reiterated this belief:

“Story can pass on morals, values, beliefs. It can seek to regulate behavior” (*Storyteller’s Start-Up Book* 102), and Janice Del Negro recently stated, “Storytelling is a way of giving this extremely vulnerable age group (twens) a sense that they can be the heroes of their own lives and the creators of their own stories” (*Folktales* 105).

### Vicarious Experience

Fundamental to the concept of character education through modeling is the idea that stories provide a vicarious experience and a fictionalized setting in which to examine and experiment with different identities, beliefs, and cultures. Through the process of imagination and visualization, children would identify with story characters, “vicariously experience dangerous events and intense emotions without actually having to participate in them” (Del Negro, *Folktales* 104–5) and learn coping strategies that might apply to their real-world lives. As Elizabeth Nesbitt stated, “Story-telling provides the opportunity to interpret for the child life forces which are beyond his immediate experience, and so to prepare him for life itself” (“Hold” 14).

This is bibliotherapy—the process of using a book or story to lead children to understanding—at its best, and most of the authors in this study mentioned the imaginative power of storytelling to evoke narrative worlds that are immersive and “lived.” In fact, May G. Quigley believed this issue was paramount, claiming, “the primary object of story-telling to children is to develop their imagination” (“Telling Stories” 351). Librarians could “cultivate the imagination” (Scott, “Story Hour” 277) by helping the child make “a succession of mental pictures” (Olcott, *Children’s Reading* 40), thereby stocking the child’s “mind with poetic imagery and literary allusions” (Olcott, “Story Telling” 288) that helped the child “to visualize, to fantasize, [which] is the basis of creative imagination” (Baker, *Storytelling* 20).

During storytelling, “limiting boundaries disappear” (Shaw, “I’ll” 68) as “over the sordid surroundings, week after week, year after year, has come the magic of the tale that is told” (Jordan, “Story-Telling” 180). Children can become “lost in a larger world of the imagination” (Power, *Work with Children* 99) with the ultimate result that storytelling can “broaden the horizon of ordinary men, which can give them the extent of their potential greatness” (Nesbitt, “Art” 443), and open “doors upon worlds that may be new and different to them—and better” (Shaw, “I’ll” 68). During a tale well told, listeners are given “the space, the time, and the words with which to build in their imaginations the ‘topless towers,’ ‘the stately pleasure domes,’ the shapes and sounds none knows nor hears save each mind for itself”

(Sayers, "From" 2011). As Elizabeth Huntoon states, "it is the uniquely personal images that the listeners see in their own imaginations that make storytelling a powerful and enduring medium" ("Enduring Value" 221).

### **Culture and History**

As children create their own imaginary worlds from the words of the storyteller, they can escape from the boundaries of their surroundings, expand their horizons, and deepen their understanding of history and culture, both their own and that of others. The power of storytelling to share culture and build community has been well known to librarians since the early twentieth century. In 1909, Anne Carroll Moore addressed the "possibilities presented by the story hour in preserving to the children of foreign parentage the traditions and the folk tales of their native countries, [and] in giving to rural communities a wider range of interests in reading" ("Storytelling" 413). In 1945, Elizabeth Nesbitt wrote eloquently that storytelling "is one method whereby the hearts and minds of children may be opened to the fact that the present stems from the past, that we of the new world share a common heritage with those of the old" ("Art" 443), and that it "has dealt with, helped to preserve, and interpreted anew for each generation the accumulated wisdom of the literature of all ages and all peoples" (442–43). Spencer Shaw writes that storytelling "has revealed the existence of a common humanity" ("Cross-Cultural" 175), and Janice Del Negro extended this perspective to include the future: "Storytelling, sometimes considered quaint and old-fashioned, bridges the seemingly infinite space between the recent past and the onrushing future" ("Whole" 6).

Librarians believed that this expanded knowledge of others would lead to sympathy, respect, and eventually, empathy for others. "The story provides an excellent opportunity to stimulate children's interest in cultures and ways of life different from their own and serves to develop an appreciation and respect for others" that should ultimately "make children aware of the oneness of mankind" (Shaw, "Storytelling" 18) and help them "realize how people the world over are subject to the same weaknesses and have the same sources of strength" (Shaw, "I'll" 68). Jane Buel Bradley explored this idea a bit more deeply when she explained how folktales and storytelling, "give us a sense of security and trust in others which is indispensable to our health and growth [...]. This helps [children] feel at home in their world, which is their right" ("Listening Heart" 677). "Sharing story broadens our awareness of other cultures and gives us a deeper understanding

of our own. We begin to understand some of the many ways of being...through story we begin to understand ourselves" (MacDonald, *Storyteller's Start-Up* 101).

### Connection, Trust, and Emotional Exchange

The ideas of community and heritage, addressed above, speak to another issue commonly mentioned by librarians as an enduring value of storytelling: it creates a bond—a "from me to you quality" (Greene, "There Are" 25) between teller and listener—that opens the door to emotional engagement with each other and with the story. Jeanne Hardendorff summed up this perception eloquently when she wrote, "Those who work with children must prove to each child that they are worthy of receiving the child's confidence and trust before they are able to establish rapport. It is in this respect that storytelling has proved invaluable" ("Storytelling" 56).

The story hour "brings friendship with it and a bond of understanding" (Hardendorff, *Stories to Tell*) that "establishes a very pleasant relation between the children who hear the story and the person who tells it" (Blanchard, "Storytelling" 291). Storytelling brings the librarian "into closer personal touch with the children" (Duff, "Story-Telling" 416) partly because "if she has actually lived the stories with them, she has a far better understanding of the things which they enjoy" (Hazeltine, "Story-Telling" 413), but also because "once you tell a story they love, they accept you as a friend. They feel you speak their language" (Bradley, "Listening Heart" 677). By sharing a story, "youth and adult share a mutual learning experience in a warm, emotional atmosphere" that provides "an outlet where there is no disparity of age and their interest has value" (Shaw, "Story Falls" 179). The storyteller is also "permitted to share ideals, problems, and emotions of both your storied characters and your listeners" (Shaw, "I'll" 68), giving "groups of children an opportunity to enjoy mutually the music of the spoken word, the taste of good prose on the tongue, [and] the communion of shared adventure and emotion" (Sayers, "From" 2010–11). "When we tell, we show our willingness to be vulnerable, to expose our deepest feelings, our values. That kind of nakedness that says you care about what you're relating invites children to listen with open minds and hearts" (Baker, *Storytelling* 17).

It is the storyteller's vulnerability, this willingness to wear the emotions of the story characters as though they were one's own, that enables listeners to become immersed in the story world because when listeners can *feel* as the story characters do, they begin to *care* for those characters and identify with them. Then,

the marvelous panoply of emotions experienced by the story characters become available to the children without the potential negative effects of real-world emotional expression. Librarians tended to focus on the emotions of joy and pleasure in their descriptions. “[Storytelling] must give delight and joy in itself or it is without justification, no matter what secondary objects seem to be accomplished” (Scott, *Storytelling* 49). Hallie Loomis Craytor states that “stories have their own excuse for being told. They give pure unmitigated joy and happiness” (“Do You Have” 139), and Marie Shedlock expressed that “of all the effects which I hope for from the telling of stories in the schools, I, personally, place first the dramatic joy we bring to the children and to ourselves” (*Art of the Storyteller* 104).

Other emotions were also mentioned: a sense of “quietness,” “the quickening of a sense of humor” (Jordan, “Story-Telling” 183), a space “in which gasping, laughing, or crying are *expected* behaviors” (MacDonald, *Storyteller’s Start-Up* 102, italics in original), and a feeling of “wonder” (Sawyer, “Editorial” 15). Indeed, all of the emotions humans can express become available to story listeners. As Ruth Sawyer explains, the storyteller “draws her listeners into the happenings of the story, making them an integral part of it. They share in those vivid emotions called forth: expectancy, wonder, courage, compassion, curiosity, and delight in the fun and the absurdities” (“Storyteller’s Approach” 51). She further writes: “The echoes [of the storyteller’s voice] are not only sound, but spirit, for the storyteller working with words, words that clothe and change and charge all the emotion the heart endures, or is capable of enduring—the storyteller deals with the stuff of the spirit” (Sayers, “From” 2010). Augusta Baker reaffirms this perception: “Storytelling brings to the listeners heightened awareness—a sense of wonder, or mystery, of reverence for life. This nurturing of the spirit-self comes first. It is the primary purpose of storytelling, and all other uses and effects are secondary” (*Storytelling* 17).

### Listening, Language, and Memory

There were also more “educational” values of storytelling, and these tended to center on developing listening skills (concentration, attention, and interest), extending children’s vocabulary and the concomitant benefit of experiencing the beauty and variety of the English language, understanding narrative structure, and increasing the retention of story elements.

Despite questioning the place of storytelling in libraries, John Cotton Dana admitted that “it must be a delight to have the opportunity to hold the attention

of a group of children” or to actually “improve [...] their power of attention” (“Story-Telling” 349). Alice I. Hazeltine also mentioned that storytelling helped “the development of the power of interest and attention” (“Story-Telling” 414). Frances Jenkins Olcott claimed that storytelling “develops [the child’s] power of concentration” (“Story Telling” 288). Kathy East mentioned that “in today’s world, storytelling is one of the few activities that teaches the skill of being an audience” because it “demands a unique kind of attention” (“To Be” 221). Janice Del Negro explained that “listening to oral stories has been closely connected to the acquisition of literacy skills, the expansion of vocabulary, and the development of active listening skills” (“Whole” 6).

Storytelling has the power to give children a “familiarity with good English [and] an appreciation of form” (Hazeltine, “Story-Telling” 414), thereby “enlarg[ing] the vocabulary of the listeners” (Duff, “Story-Telling” 416), “establishing standards of language and expression” (Scott, *Storytelling* 49), “expos[ing] them to new language and narrative structure” (Del Negro, *Folktales* 9), and improving children’s knowledge of the “patterns of language” (Baker, *Storytelling* 20). “It enables [the storyteller], through the magic quality of the spoken word, to reveal to the child the charm and subtle connotations of word sounds, all the evanescent beauty emanating from combinations of words and from the cadence, the haunting ebb and flow, of rhythmical prose” (Nesbitt, “Hold” 14). Alice M. Jordan summarized the point eloquently:

Out of the repetition of melodious expressions as they reach the ear comes an appreciation of languages not easily gained from the printed page. If we want to enlarge the limited vocabularies of our young people, we may well turn back to Greek models and let them hear the sound of such memorable passages as Homer’s “Now when the early rosy-fingered Dawn appeared.” (“Story-Telling” 182–83)

Finally, because of the intimacy established between storyteller and listeners, storytelling has the power to improve memory and the retention of what is experienced. “I think the reason [the Cinderella story] was remembered was because of the dramatic form in which it was presented to [a little girl], which fired her imagination and kept the memory alight” (Shedlock, *Art* 100). “This intimacy in sharing makes of a story told a far more memorable experience than a story read by a child to himself; in this lies one of the indisputable values of storytelling” (Sawyer, “Storyteller’s Approach” 51).

## Quantitative Analysis

An analysis of the occurrence of various words in the corpus of quotations showed that most of the main topic categories, identified in the qualitative assessment above, have enduring resonance for librarians. The emphasis on using storytelling to bring children to books and reading is prevalent throughout these quotations; the word *books* (with 36 occurrences) was the most common word once stop-words and the words *children*, *story*, *stories*, and *storytelling* were removed from the corpus. Related words were also prevalent: *reading* (21), *literature* (17), *read* (16), and *book* (8). Voyant software can show trends across a corpus by dividing it into “segments” and visually depicting the occurrence of selected words within those segments. When examined across a corpus in which the words are organized chronologically, these frequencies can depict changes over time. The frequency of these five books-and-reading-related terms showed an ongoing emphasis for this value of storytelling in libraries. There was, however, a slight decrease in frequency for the latter half of the corpus, perhaps due to a growing interest in storytelling for its own sake.

An analysis of the value of storytelling for emotional engagement—including the words *joy* (11), *pleasure* (8), *wonder* (6), *emotions* (5), and *delight* (4)—showed a fluctuating distribution across time, but there is evidence of ongoing belief in this value. It is interesting to note that the lowest frequency of book-related terms (segment 5) coincides with one of the higher frequencies of emotional terms. Four of the eleven instances of the word *joy*, for example, occur in section five because Marie Shedlock, whose quotations appear in this segment, believed it to be a more important value than motivating children to read: “I, personally, place first the dramatic joy we bring to the children and to ourselves” (*Art* 104).

The value of storytelling to evoke children’s imaginations and to get them picturing or visualizing the unfolding story—including the words *imagination* (15), *imaginings* (7), *pictures* (6), *imaginative* (4), or *imagery* (2)—was also important with a combined frequency of 34 occurrences in this corpus. Their distribution showed consistent emphasis across time.

Similar to emotional engagement, the emphasis on imagination and visualization trends somewhat in opposition to the emphasis on books and reading. This makes sense, since certain librarians had strong beliefs in the relative merits of storytelling for librarianship. Still, even the *lowest* frequency for the books-and-reading words (4 occurrences in segment 5) compared strongly with the *highest*

frequencies for emotions (6) and imagination (7), evidence of the dominance among librarians of the perception that storytelling's primary value is to bring children to books.

## Conclusions

Storytelling in libraries has consistently been viewed as an activity *for children*; indeed, the most common word in the corpus of quotations from these librarians was “children” (76 occurrences). It is of no surprise, then, that the primary values of storytelling would be related to its impact on the children themselves, rather than the storyteller or the institution. It is also of little wonder that the primary value of storytelling for children in libraries—which have focused their collections on books for the last 120 years—has remained the motivation of reading and the benefits associated with that practice.

What is intriguing in these findings—and what may prove germane to the developing trends in children's librarianship and the changing demographics of the United States—is the aggregate value of all of the discrete issues examined here: Books and Reading; Character Education; Vicarious Experience; Culture and History; Connection, Trust, and Emotional Exchange; and Listening, Language, and Memory. Synthesized together, these issues address the potential of storytelling to *empower* children. It helps them: (1) *trust* and *empathize with* others, (2) *remember* the past, (3) *explore* possible futures, (4) *communicate* more effectively, and (5) *grow* into mature and responsible (and reading) adults. As our world becomes more diverse and our communication pathways expand into the digital realm, storytelling may increasingly become the powerful “civilizing” influence early librarians believed and wanted it to be. Storytelling enables children to be the “heroes of their own lives and the creators of their own stories” (Del Negro, *Folktales* 105).

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