



Library Corner

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Turning the Summer Slide into a Helping Hand

by Ellen Myrick

One of the biggest issues facing student achievement and continuous improvement is the summer slide. Research has shown that over the summer, all students lose some reading ability, with low-income students losing the most, and this gap widens each summer. However, students who read at least 5-6 books at their reading levels over the summer months can maintain/improve their reading skills. While summer reading programs at public libraries can keep kids reading over the long summer months, many children don't participate because of transportation, location, or motivation. One solution that has proven effective in systems throughout the country is keeping the school library open during the summer.

Elizabeth Polk is the Assistant Director for Libraries at the Austin Independent School District in Austin, Texas. "Over half of Austin's students live in poverty and school libraries may be their first and only access to books and resources so that they may not only practice and grow as readers, but also develop crucial library and information literacy skills," explains Polk. Participating schools are all in the Title One program and librarians must have support from their school principals. Student participation is most likely to be highest where free lunches or breakfasts are offered. Cynthia Helms at Champaign Public Schools in Illinois followed the same model of coinciding library hours to free meals. She was able to keep all elementary and middle school libraries open daily for limited hours for most of the summer break.

Polk explains that "During the school year, students don't have time to browse because of testing--this is when they get to really experience reading for pleasure." As the supervisor for Austin ISD's library program, Polk finds the funding and develops the format for the program.

Before the summer break begins, librarians send out information to parents ahead of time with permission slips. The libraries are not open all day long or every day though some do one evening a week so parents can come and read along with the kids.

Elizabeth Polk finds choosing a common theme to be useful as well. The 2010 oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico put ocean science into the news, so that summer they



focused on oceanography. "The students looked up applicable science experiments and found one on how to clean birds," remembers Polk. The realities of the impact of the oil spill and part of the solution became real to those students.

This next summer's theme will be green: "We'll be gardening, recycling, and practicing some of the ideas we research," promises Polk. Librarians have latitude to be creative as well, making up fun activities that show off

their library's resources. She adds, that for school libraries over the summer, "There's no homework, no studying, and kids come to read for the fun of it."

The studies all point to the importance of reading over the summer to prevent the summer slide. In Austin, the school libraries keep a record of how many books each child reads and how often he or she comes to the library. "For children in poverty and those who don't have lots of books in their home, they just don't have access to books." Transportation, however, remains a challenge. School buses don't run during the summer and liability issues keep city buses from transporting kids to the schools. "We're still exploring options," says the confident Polk.

This service is not intended to replace a public library's outreach efforts. "We take walking field trips to the public library." Polk concludes that "We want them to be lifelong readers and come to know and appreciate the power and pleasure of books."

In Champaign, the findings were similarly positive: "Students and families that used the school libraries were enthusiastic about having access to a library in their neighborhood during the summer."

A student who has built a relationship with the library and the librarian during the summer is more likely to use the resources more extensively during the following school year.

<http://webjunctionworks.org/il/blog/index.php/2013/08/26/schools-out-for-summer-but-the-library-is-still-open/>

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Featured Author: **Kate Klise**

Bookish Sisters

Kate Klise shares more than just a love of creating highly readable and always entertaining books with her collaborator Sarah. She also shares DNA.

Kate and M. Sarah Klise created their first book together when they were ten and eleven years old. Their mother was an elementary school teacher and their father created educational films and Mom would read to them at bedtime. Kate, the future writer, lay in bed with her eyes closed, letting the theatre of the mind play out the action. Sarah, the future illustrator, jumped out of the bed to closely examine the illustrations. "Our mother insisted we make the gifts we give one another," explains Kate, so the decidedly non-crafty Kate asked her sister to illustrate a story she had written as a gift. They have been working together ever since.

The 43 Old Cemetery Road series balances funny and scary in a way that engages readers. "I know these characters so well," says Kate, who is at work on her seventh "Cemetery Road" book. "It's fun to spend so much time with characters that you can almost sit back and let them tell the story." She feels this way both as a writer and as a reader. "If I'm interested in the characters, I stick around

for the ride--I like them because they are flawed and quirky." Readers of the entire series will get to see a special payoff in the seventh book. That's all we're going to say but it's going to be *good*!

When Kate finishes a manuscript, the copy-edited story is then sent to Sarah who creates the illustrations. The sisters then begin a back-and-forth process, each building on the work of the other. That shared family experience sometimes reveals itself in surprising ways. "We noticed all the villains resemble certain unsavory characters in high school," Kate chuckles.

Perhaps that ability to access all the elements of school life contributes to the appeal of the Klise books. Kate finds herself conflicted when she receives letters from kids who admit that they never liked reading until they read one of her books. "On one level that is great, but on another it breaks my heart because it shouldn't take all those years to find a book they love," she explains. "I want to create books that make kids want to read more books."

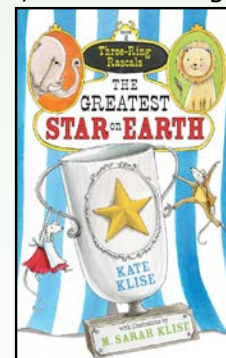


That compulsion to pull kids to reading at a younger age is the reason behind the new Three-Ring Rascals series. Sarah provides her whimsical line drawings but



The Show Must Go On is crafted for younger readers who are ready for a chapter book. More illustrations, generous white space, lots of dialog, and talking animals all play a part in the success of this circus. "I pitched it as Downton Abbey meets

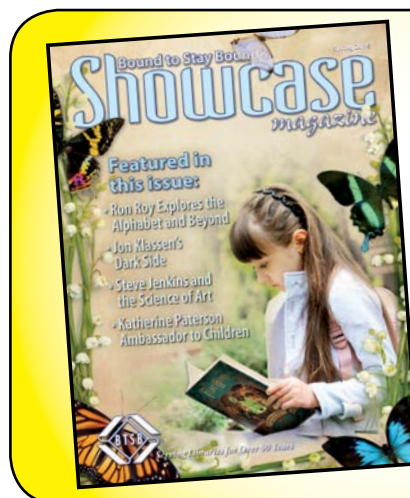
Doctor Doolittle," recalls Kate. She wanted to capture the upstairs/downstairs dynamic and decided a circus would be the perfect setting. "I wanted to create a series that is fun and warm-hearted and never mean-spirited." Here's to hoping that not only does the show go on but also this sisterly collaboration.



Interviewed by Ellen Myrick.

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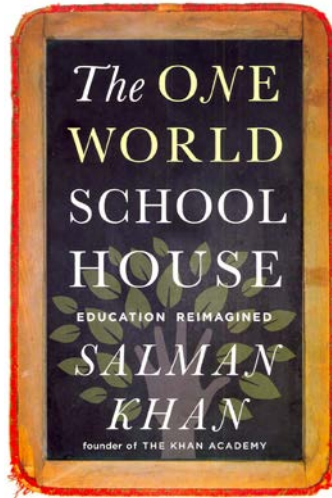
Book Reviews

by Bob Sibert

The One World Schoolhouse: Education Reimagined, by Salman Khan. Published by Hachette Book Group in 2012. 259 pages.

Salman Khan was a brainy MIT graduate and a highly paid hedge fund analyst in 2004 when he decided to help his 12-year-old cousin Nadia with some areas of math she was struggling with. He became fascinated with teaching and, over the next four years, he developed hundreds of Youtube video tutorials on math and science, as well as work problems and tracking software to go with them. Shortly after he quit his day job in 2008, Khan received funding from Google and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and was well on his way to educating millions of people around the world.

In this book he explains what he has learned about education over the past eight years operating his Khan Academy, although he first spends over half the book discussing the things he doesn't like about traditional education. His criticisms include the Balkanization of subject areas, the passivity of the lecture method, the inability of tests to identify creative thinkers, the lack of "mastery" learning, and the emphasis on quantity instead of quality in homework, as well as many other criticisms.



Khan then relates how his series of videos were developed and how successful they have been in various summer camps and in pilot projects such as the Los Altos School District in California. He does not go so far as to suggest that his videos can take the place of classroom teaching, rather that they can be an invaluable supplement in enriching and customizing the teaching of math and science to the individual needs of students. He concludes by arguing that his videos could potentially have the greatest impact in Third World nations that need a cost-effective way to improve their public education systems, and where a shortage of quality teachers is a real problem.

Along the way he also touches on many improvements that could be made to public education that are only tangentially related to his Khan Academy methods, in areas such as homework, grades, mixed age classrooms, and year-round schools.

Everyone in public education should be aware of what the Khan Academy has to offer their students. In addition, I think you will find Salman Khan's thoughts on education to be refreshing and provocative, but not bombastic.

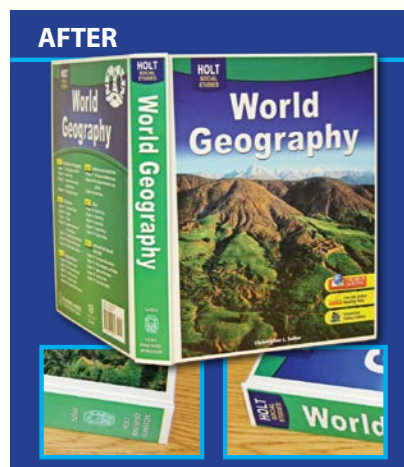
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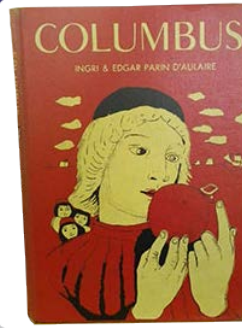
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December: Share a video of librarians or students singing their favorite Pete the Cat Song.

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