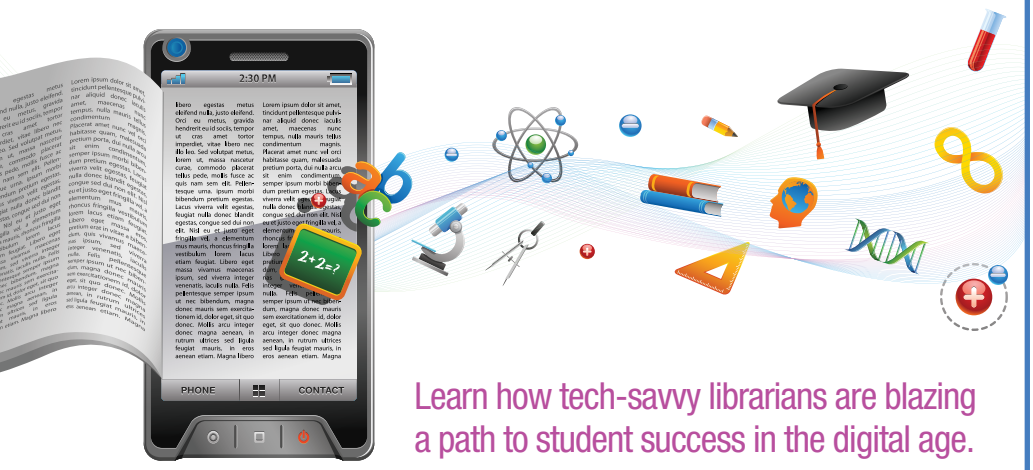
Not Your Grandmother's Library!

By Lisa Perez



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Learn how tech-savvy librarians are blazing a path to student success in the digital age.

Some schools sport professionally staffed, state-of-the-art libraries that serve as centers of inquiry where students master technology and develop information literacy skills. Others languish with industrial age facilities designed for 20th century learning, or worse yet, they have no libraries at all.

Fortunately, thousands of school librarians in recent years have acquired the skills they need to help students and teachers fully embrace the benefits that a modern library offers.

Keys to Success

School libraries are an essential part of a complete school program. They provide an equitable, fiscally responsible strategy for sharing resources across grade levels and the curriculum while addressing core reading, information, and technology literacies.

Let's face it, students are still voracious readers of books in print, and now they consume a variety of electronic formats. This makes having a digital age library more important than ever. At no other time in history have students needed such pronounced information literacy to effectively navigate and use vast amounts of information. The following examples highlight the work of a handful of savvy librarians who are leveraging technology to prepare students for a successful future.

Inquiry-Based Instruction

Joyce Valenza writes an award-winning blog for *School Library Journal* called The Neverending Search. The title is also descriptive of her library program at Springfield Township High School in Erdenheim, Pennsylvania, where she seeks to identify the latest technologies and resources to support her students' information needs and creativity.

Springfield Township High School serves more than 700 students in grades 8–12. The middle-class suburban high school, located outside Philadelphia, offers an array of AP and honors classes. More than 90% of students are college bound. Springfield's inquiry-based instructional model makes access to a robust library program vital.

The Springfield Township Library encourages student learning with spaces for individual work, production, group collaboration, and presentation. Technology is readily accessible; the library provides more than 80 desktop computers and various multimedia production tools. Students

Tech Infusion

Wendy Stephens, the librarian at Buckhorn High School in New Market, Alabama, is preparing her students for technological advances that we can now only imagine. She believes "that the searching and information evaluation skills our students learn in school will underpin all sorts of future information landscapes." Stephens' infusion of technology in her library program does much to prepare her students for that future. She is certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, received the Chiquita Marbury Award for Technology Innovation in 2009, and is a Google Certified Teacher, among other honors.

About 1,300 students attend Buckhorn from nearby rural and suburban communities. The student body is about 32% minority, and 23% receive free or reduced-price lunch. Stephens describes the library as contemporary and spacious, with panoramic views, vaulted ceilings, and skylights. The library has 14 computers,

SIGMS

ISTE's Special Interest Group for Media Specialists (SIGMS) provides a community for school library media specialists to gather and learn about technologies that improve the operation and programs of the school library media center, increase access to information, and create a more effective and efficient teaching and learning environment.

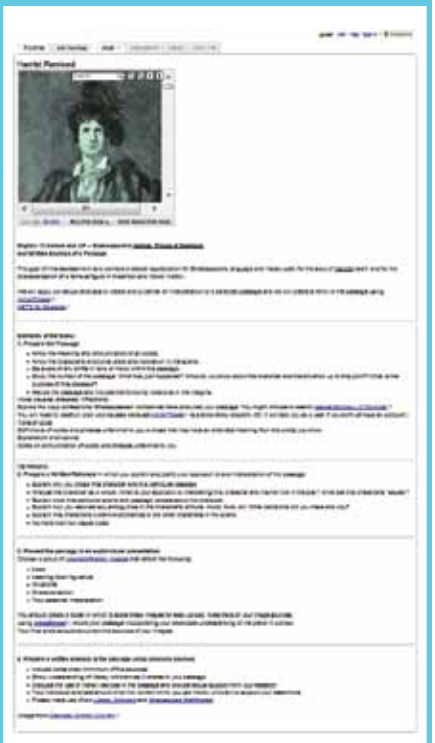
SIGMS provides many opportunities to get involved, including contributing to the SIG's newsletter; helping to organize professional development activities, such as webinar or book discussions; or simply attending events in Second Life and sharing your views and experiences with others. For more information, visit www.iste.org/sigms.

also bring laptops to access the library's wireless network. Two part-time library assistants and volunteers help Valenza keep the library actively serving students.

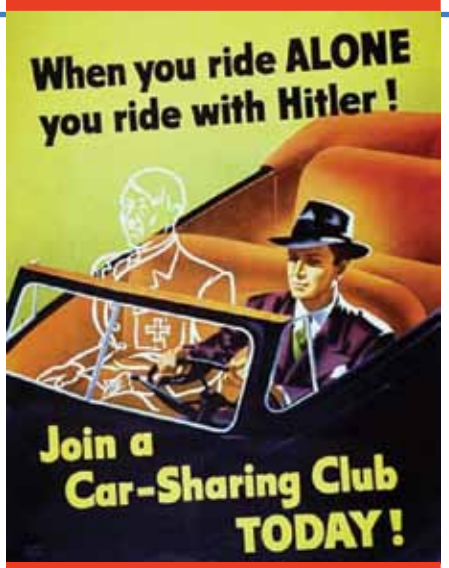
U.S. history students recently engaged in a project to help them develop empathy and a better understanding of the Great Depression. They used primary source documents and online analysis tools from the Library of Congress to examine photographs of the era. To develop deeper contextual knowledge, they explored resources that Valenza vetted and compiled in a companion electronic pathfinder. This crosscurricular project also involved language arts components in which students created "found poems" that integrate lines and phrases from existing text and remixed them with the students' own language. The assessment artifacts were digital VoiceThread stories and an online anthology of their found poems, which debuted during film-festival and live museum experiences. Valenza used a wiki to house all aspects of the project (see Resources on page 19).

In another project called Hamlet Remixed, English honors students prepared personal interpretations of selected passages of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Using *The Oxford English Dictionary*, they studied the pronunciations and meanings of the passages and developed an interpretive analysis of the selections. Valenza advised them about copyright law and properly citing resources. Students viewed YouTube videos to see how professional Shakespearean companies have produced and performed the passages. Next, students located Creative Commons images that reflected the meaning and mood of their passages and used these to create VoiceThreads with their own voice narrations.

"It is the most exciting time to be a teacher librarian," Valenza says. "In the past three years, the information and communication landscapes have shifted entirely, making continual retooling a professional essential."



The goal of Hamlet Remixed is to achieve a deeper appreciation for Shakespeare's language and literary craft, for the story of Hamlet, and for the characterization of a famous figure in theatrical and literary history.



This image is from a wiki page titled Rami's notebook and is one example students used for Stephens' activity on war-time propaganda posters. Students choose a poster, describe its purpose, identify its author and intended audience, then share their opinions about the poster's message.

several laptops, and digital and video cameras. Approximately 14,000 volumes make up the collection of books. A paraprofessional also works in the library. The school's administration has a strong track record of supporting the library in the allocation of the school's technology resources.

For an elective class on the "great wars," Stephens developed an activity that involves looking at wartime propaganda posters. Students used wikis as digital notebooks to collect images, research the iconography behind the posters, and provide commentary on each poster. Stephens said that teachers appreciate the facilitated assessment process when they find each student's artifacts conveniently located on wikis.

Stephens enjoys helping teachers find the right digital tools to meet their needs. An English teacher shared with Stephens that she wanted her students to reflect their reading in a nonprint format. Stephens suggested that the students create podcasts using their cell phones. She also pointed out that by using an RSS feed, the teacher could listen to all of the student podcasts at her desk. Wendy worked with the students in the library to set up Gcast accounts (see iLike in Resources on page 19) and showed them how to record the podcasts. It's no surprise that many students completed their assignment that very night.

Stephens credits the collaborative nature of her colleagues as a key to the success of her library program, and her advocacy for the use of ed tech helps foster those relationships. "Knowing that I will be willing to provide a safety net for the technical aspects definitely allows members of our faculty to take more technological risks with their instruction, assignments, and assessment. I think there are lots of librarians out there willing to support the same types of projects."

Empowered Learning

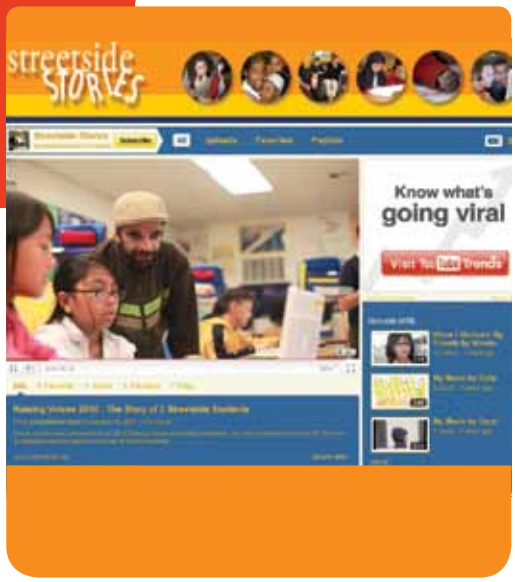
Most charter schools are hard pressed to fund professionally staffed libraries, but Monarch Academy, part of the Aspire Charter Schools network, had the foresight to do just that. Keisa Williams has been Monarch's librarian for the past five years. She is always trying new things to keep her program relevant to students, and her use of technology plays a big role in her success. Monarch Academy received the prestigious National Distinguished Title I School Recognition Program Award in 2008—an award that recognizes marked, sustained academic improvement in schools serving high-poverty areas. A strong school library program is part of the recipe for that success.

Monarch Academy serves about 350 students in grades K–5 in Oakland, California. The school population is 97% Latino students of Mexican heritage and 3% African-American. Ninety-seven percent of the students are low income. The library operates on a fixed schedule in which Williams sees classes while the teachers have their preparation periods. This doesn't stop her from providing a strong, curriculum-based program that heavily infuses technology. Her one-room library has three areas: a computer center, a seating area, and a storytelling area. It houses a cart of 24 computers, a whiteboard, and listening centers in addition to a collection of about 7,000 print titles.

This illustration from Maria's Boxing Movie is one of many images that Aspire Public Schools students created and brought to life as part of the Streetside Stories project.

Monarch's fourth and fifth grade students recently participated in a digital storytelling project called Streetside Stories, part of the Teacher's Edge program funded by the U.S. Department of Education. The library played an integral role in

Streetside Stories is a San Francisco-based literacy arts nonprofit that helps students share their life stories, connect with the arts, and improve their literacy skills through the power of storytelling.



Getting Connected

Why are those kids wearing long sleeves and sweatshirts? That was the question that fourth grade Arizona students asked their teacher when they were on a Skype call with students at Horace Mann Elementary School in West Allis, Wisconsin. This real-life observation led to a conversation about variations in climate—one of many interesting discussions initiated by Skype calls that Mann librarian Chad Lehman facilitated with his students and others from around the United States, as part of his class geographical research.

Technology is evident throughout the library and in the adjoining computer lab. Together, both spaces provide 35 desktop computers for a school of about 400 students in grades PK–5. Libraries in Wisconsin are not subject to the severe funding shortfalls common in other states, thanks to the Common School Fund, a type of public education financing established by the Wisconsin Constitution to ensure a consistent budget to help maintain quality libraries for its students (see Resources).

Lehman's students seamlessly move from print to electronic resources. A robust collection of 15,000 print items and audiobooks serves as a springboard for many technology-based learning experiences. Recently, a classroom teacher read the book *The Squiggle* by Carole Lexa Schaefer. Grade 1 students followed up in the library by interpreting squiggle lines in Kid Pix software to create various fanciful electronic drawings. They used the pictures to create VoiceThread digital stories, which allowed students to create verbal descriptions of their artwork.

In another project, grade 5 students began the year by writing goals for themselves in class. At the library, Lehman taught the students how to import digital photos. Next, students uploaded their photos to a magazine cover generator app at the Big Huge Labs website and added their goals as "articles" on the covers. Students printed and proudly displayed the covers outside of their classrooms.

Prior to becoming a school librarian, Lehman worked for eight years as a third grade teacher.

This electronic drawing, created by a grade 1 student at Mann Elementary, began as a single black squiggle in Kid Pix software. This image and others produced by the class provided original artwork for digital stories created by students using the library's media tools.

When asked why he made a career move, he said, "I wanted to do more with technology, and I knew that the school librarians in my district worked with technology a lot."

the program's success. Williams spent the year co-teaching with classroom teachers and a media coach to engage students in a crosscurricular movie-making project that combined script writing, oral expression, student artwork, and technology skills to create movies that tell each child's personal story. The students made the movies using a MacBook mobile lab, iMovie, and GarageBand software.

Williams' primary-grade students have also made several digital stories as part of Monarch's CARES program. CARES, which stands for cooperation, assertiveness, responsibility, empathy, and self-control, uses literature to promote a culture of caring and responsibility. Students created a VoiceThread based on the book *Wangari's Trees of Peace*. They also created a video of a puppet show based on a story inspired by the book *The Librarian of Basra: A True Story from Iraq* (see Resources).

Williams' students use technology to help each other too. Using the website Screencast-o-matic, students have created short instructional videos to explain common technology-related vocabulary terms. Williams uses technology extensively to help support learning at Monarch. Her electronic pathfinders provide links to information about resources on specific topics, such as dictionaries. Students learn important information literacy skills by using a Glogster poster that points to important resources and by visiting online learning centers that provide game-like educational experiences.

Williams knows that many of her students do not have access to computers outside of school, so she makes sure they get the most out of the technology during their school day. "I have six years to make an impact on the life of one student. What I do in the library matters," she says.

Resources

Big Huge Labs: http://bighugelabs.com/magazine.php
Common School Fund: http://tinyurl.com/4mfzxe7
Great Depression wiki: http://tinyurl.com/4n7wzq2
Hamlet Remixed: http://hamletremixed.wikispaces.com
iLike: www.ilike.com/garageband
Monarch Academy: http://tinyurl.com/4jb3s2d
Monarch Academy CARES program: http://tinyurl.com/479m8l9
Monarch Academy tech terms wiki: http://tinyurl.com/yfxa68k
School Library Journal blog: http://tinyurl.com/2effolt
Screencast-O-Matic: www.screencast-o-matic.com
Streetside Stories: www.streetside.org/programs/digital-teachers.htm

Lisa Perez is an area library coordinator for the Chicago Public Schools Department of Libraries. She is also chair of ISTE's Special Interest Group for Media Specialists.