

# THOMPSON FREE LIBRARY

## QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

January, 2021



### UNMASKING NEW DIRECTOR, JON KNEPP by Tom Lyford



In November I was privileged to be part of the library welcome wagon when Jon, our future new director, accompanied by wife, Kazia (rhymes with “Asia”) and their two little boys, Cooper and Andy (ages 9 and 6 respectively) first walked into TFL after their pandemically long drive all the way from Alexandria, PA. They must have been exhausted but, for me, it was a happy, invigorating meeting. I, Greta, members of the Executive Committee, and the Knepps were all masked up, of course, like walking, talking, wild west *Wanted Dead or Alive* posters, so we never got much of an idea of what the family actually *looked* like, nor they *us*. It still seems pretty weird that after working in relatively close proximity to Jon for the first couple of weeks, I *still* didn’t know what he really looked like under that mask. So recently, I accosted him with a number of “interview questions” designed to catch some glimpses of the inner, if not the outer, Jon Knepp.

The first little blip on my radar screen? A sense of humor: “I’m surprised that the only wild animals I’ve seen since moving here are crows. My family has specifically gone out looking for moose, and has not seen any. Not a deer, nor even a squirrel. I’m beginning to think the whole ‘wildlife’ idea of Maine is a lie you tell outsiders to get tourists. Do you even *have lobsters?*”

On the subject of native cuisine: “At least you have whoopie pies up here.” He went on to say that in one “godforsaken county...” (in PA) “...they call whoopie pies ‘gobs,’ and fill them with the wrong kind of icing. I could write a treatise on the ways gobs are inferior to whoopie pies, and have started to on numerous occasions.”

Naturally I had to quiz him on his taste in books. “I read a lot of Sci-Fi novels and historical nonfiction, though I tend to get bogged down in some of the historical books. 900 pages into the Korean War, I usually become distracted by something else. Also, I have to constantly remind myself that it’s ok to read popular fiction, which I do enjoy, but after years of history classes, it’s hard to let myself read books specifically for fun.”

I asked him about travel. “I went to the Caribbean after high school on a cruise, which I should have appreciated more at the time, but I was an angsty teenager. Went to Aruba, Barbados, the Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, Dominica, and a few other islands. In college, I was a German minor and spent a summer abroad in Munster, Germany. While there, I traveled to Bonn, Amsterdam, Brussels, Bruges, Bremen, Vienna, Budapest, and spent a lot of time in Cologne. After college, my good friend Ryan became an Americorps volunteer in Hawaii, so Kazia and I took the opportunity to go to there. Ryan lived in the part that was more meth heads running from Dog the Bounty Hunter and homeless camps on the beach than the resorts and luaus I’d imagined. Since our trip to Hawaii, work and kids have complicated things, but we’ve managed to travel to Maine a couple of times, once driving through to the Bay of Fundy and Nova Scotia and coming back along Route 1, which we really love.” *Wow. That’s a lot of travel.*

An experienced information science professional, Jon has a background in academic, nonprofit and government positions. He received a Master’s of Science in Archival Management from Simmons College in Boston, Mass. in 2010, and has a B.A. in History with a secondary emphasis in German from Juniata College in Huntingdon, Pa. While pursuing his Master’s degree at Simmons, Knepp held positions at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum in Dorchester, MA, and the Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College, Harvard University in Cambridge, Mass. He also conducted internships at Emerson College in Boston and at the National Archives Northeast Facility in Waltham, Mass. Since 2011, Knepp has been employed as part of a large-scale, government records digitization project. He has previously worked as the manager/cataloger for the Huntingdon (Pa.) County Library, managing daily operations for the branch. *And...if you snoop around in his Facebook pages, you’ll discover he did a stint as a hotshot sports writer for the Morrisons Cove Herald in Martinsburg, PA. Wow. That’s a lot of credentials.*

But *voila!* Here he is at last, finally unmasked in the above photo (which we’ll tape to the doorjamb of his office so we won’t forget what he really looks like as we *keep on keepin’ on* into the Indeterminate Masked Future).

Welcome, Jon. You are now a member in good standing of our little TFL staff “family.”

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### *PARTING IS SUCH SWEET SORROW* by Tom Lyford

I've struggled with so many adjectives and nouns, trying to find the right combination of accurate words and phrases. And then, fortunately, I happened back upon the May 9, 2018 *Piscataquis Observer* press release originally announcing TFL's *then* new director of services: "The committee is impressed with Greta's professionalism and poise, her work experience and educational background, her communications skills, and her obvious enthusiasm for the role of the public library in a rural community." Yes. Her professionalism and poise. Her communication skills and her obvious enthusiasm. Two simple phrases and there you have it: our Greta in a nutshell. And I know for a fact (and in my heart) that each one in our four-person staff has felt blessed under Greta's strong professional leadership, communication skills, and enthusiasm.



The first noticeable change under Greta's directorship, for me, was a physical alteration in the shelf placement of certain types of books: the *Maine* adult non-fiction suddenly mixed right in with the *general* adult non-fiction. The *western* novels shuffled right in with all the other novels. Then the *large* print novels followed suit. Then the mixing in of all the children's Disney dvds with all the other juvenile movies. Now, a curmudgeon like me doesn't relish change and I admit I wasn't happy, at *first*, with the new arrangements. "We never done it like that in *my* day! Ayuh." Then, however, I quickly began discovering how much more expediently I could find and pull a book off the shelf in the stacks to place into the hot little waiting hands of a patron.

And suddenly TFL was on the path to becoming *Program City*. There were several new things to do in "Maine's Most Boring Town." In addition to our regular programs, the Philosophy circle seemed to appear out of nowhere to quickly become a monthly favorite. That was followed by the likes of our monthly Free Friday Movie Nights with Popcorn (which was wonderful), the Story Walks, the Story Slams, the Teddy Bear Sleepover, the *Voices From Home: Oral History Project*, and the *Maine Community Archives Collaborative: All in This Together—Preserving Maine's Covid-19 Memories*, etc. I'd joke with my colleagues, "Beware of talking about your favorite hobbies and interests within earshot of Greta because, next thing *you* know, she'll be telling you, 'Now *that* would make a very interesting program! Let's *do* that.'" As I recall, that's how Movie Night and the Philosophy Circle were born. And all of it was good stuff.

Greta's strong leadership really surfaced when we got slammed by the Covid-19 pandemic. With new and ever-evolving guidelines and checklists from the the Maine State Library Association and the state, she led the way, keeping us informed and up-to-date and, more importantly, leading us by her own example. So it was on with the gloves and masks, the frequent hand-washing and sanitizing, partially opened doors and windows for ventilation, the three-day quarantining of all book and dvd returns before reshelving them, curbside service only, and all further meetings and programs conducted on Zoom. It's been a hard pill for all of us, but I have to say that Greta's professionalism and poise, plus her obvious enthusiasm for the role of the public library in a rural community" throughout all of this has been an inspiration to us all.

But, alas, she's moving on, but not without our fare-thee-well staff blessings. Greta, on behalf of our "library family" of which you will always be a part, we thank you for your service and leadership here, and offer you our sincere and grateful thank you for always seeking out, and acting upon, our opinions and ideas, and for valuing our input, concerns, and daily efforts. Please know how much you will be missed, and how much we look forward to welcoming you back to TFL as a valued "family" member and patron. We want nothing less than the very best for you.

I met with Greta about a week and a half after her official last day, and asked her if this big change in her life has sunk in yet. "No, not at all, not really." Was she finding herself sleeping in during these new days of freedom? "Oh, I would really *like* to, but my cat, 'Bug,' wakes me up early every morning by swishing his tail back and forth across my face from a perch on the shelf above my bed."

For now she says she's been enjoying walks on the nearby snowmobile trails, working on a couple of sewing projects, cooking, and playing some classical music and old standards on the piano once again.

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### *THE DAY THE "MUSIC" DIED?* by Tom Lyford

See, Val Talmadge is the one who was always the hardest to spot. Most days, you had to peer over the top of the dvd shelves to catch a glimpse of her down there on the other side of the glass in her out-of-sight corner of the work room. Her job as chief cataloguer of books, audio books, and periodicals kept her spending the majority of her time at a computer entering the titles, authors, genres, barcodes, and shelf locations. Then she'd be printing out the barcodes and spine labels, and begin affixing those stickers to each item. Finally, she'd start covering the new books in protective plastic sleeves and then go on to update our *New York Times* best-seller lists with the appropriate new titles. Yes *Val*, *Val was a busy gal*. And a very *VALuable* asset.

Never *all* work and no play, however, one of the things Val will hopefully be fondly remembered for (especially by music fans, Kim and Michelle) is joining me in our occasional, *a capella*-karaoke renditions of obscure songs from days long gone by. Lonnie Donnegan's, "Does Your Chewing Gum Lose Its Flavor on the Bedpost Overnight?" for instance. The Kingston Trio's "Merry Minuet" (aka "They're Rioting in Africa." Or "Hello Muddah, Hello Faddah (A Letter from Camp).") And of course our signature opus, "The Erie Canal Song." (*"I've got a mule and her name is Sal...Fifteen miles on the Erie Canal"*). Oh, and of course it was always such a cute in-joke, the way Michelle and Kim would feign their "annoyance," as if they didn't really groove on our extemporaneous concerts.

I'm already missing Val's marvelous sense of humor, her appreciation of the fine "art" of painfully bad puns, but especially that wonderful infectious laughter of hers which I often did my darndest to set off. Adios, dear Val...



### *GO ASK ALEX* by Tom Lyford



It's the passing of the torch. And as always, "the times, they are still a-changin'." I'm feeling a deep sense of relief at seeing the TFL I love, that I have been availing myself since 1953, entrusting the reins of stewardship to such capable, well-trained, enthusiastic hands. Alex Shaffer, for instance, comes to us with a great deal of library experience under his belt.

When only a card-carrying, *juvenile* TFL patron, he wasn't only *taking out our books to read*, he was also taking a keen interest in the operations going on behind the Circulation Desk as well. Years later, you'd find him seated back there in our workroom, hunched over a couple of laptops thick as thieves with Chris Maas, learning library software systems. And while enrolled at Foxcroft Academy, Alex served as a talented and very useful FA library volunteer. After earning his diploma, it was off to the University of Southern Maine where he received his BA degree in History, and participated both as a Student Associate in a work-study program at the USM Gorham Campus Library, *and* as a Student Cartographer at the Osher Map Library in Portland. Alex volunteered extensively at TFL which has proven to be invaluable on-the-job training. During December he was educated in the complex art of cataloguing under the tutelage of our outgoing Val Talmadge.

I asked him what his duties were at the Osher. "The Osher is the second largest map library in the country. I'd conduct gallery tours, and also man the front circulation desk. If a patron requested such-and-such a map. I'd check the main computer to confirm that we had it. Then get one of the directors to retrieve it for him," he told me straightforwardly. But then I noticed his cryptic but winning smile playing about his lips.

"What?" I asked, as I could see he was remembering something.

"Well, we actually had this *one* person come up to the desk and ask, 'Do you have any *maps* here?' I mean, can you *imagine*? At a *map library*? Well, chances are pretty good that we do have some maps here. But of course I didn't say that." No. Alex wouldn't. He is too professional, and far too polite. But he has a good sense of humor. And he's so very capable. I'm delighted he's signed on to TFL because just like with Allstate Insurance, we're "in good hands."



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#### *WELCOME ADDITION* by Kim Brawn



Alicia Millette, a familiar face and name to many, has joined the TFL team. Alicia has increased the amount of STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) opportunities for families in the Dexter and Dover-Foxcroft areas for more than ten years. She has worked with the schools and run Science Clubs for middle school students and a Teen Science Café for high school students. Her focus is on expanding STEM programming to include libraries and Makerspaces. Alicia has run many popular STEM programs at TFL—where kids got to make things like magnetic and color changing slime, catapults, and hydraulic operated boxes.

“Schools and libraries are our community’s greatest resources and I have enjoyed engaging students through them,” Alicia said. More than 600 students in the Dover and Dexter area have participated in her programs which have many benefits. “Hands on activities can often make even the most complex of science and math concepts easier to understand and making them fun helps students retain the knowledge and apply it in the real world,” she explained.

“Alicia is going to be a great fit for the library,” says Jon Knepp, TFL’s new director. “Good communication skills and an eagerness to interact with the public are the first prerequisites for the job, which Alicia displayed during the interview process. She has devoted many years to promoting STEM in the region and created programming and resources that I would love to bring here.”

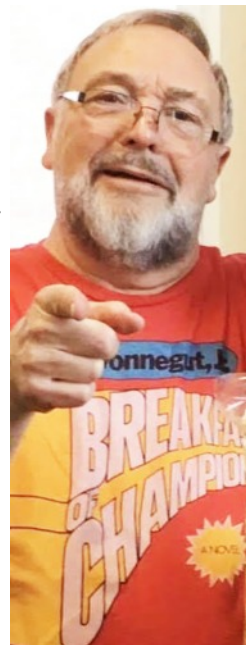
#### *“QUE SERA, SERA”* by Tom Lyford

As high school juniors in 1963, the guidance department gave us the *Strong Vocational Interest Test* to help us along in our pursuit of satisfying careers, ones for which we might have a natural aptitude or inclination. Taking that survey felt like spinning the Cosmic Big Wheel of Fortune, to see perhaps “*What will I be be? Que sera, sera...*” So many careers were up for grabs on that instrument, everything from “Obstetrician” to “Mortician.” I had my heart set on “Air Force Officer” because I just *knew* I was going to be a hot shot, fly boy jet pilot when I finally grew up.

Well, guess what. My highest score ended up pointing me straight down the nightmare path of becoming (shudder!)... a *librarian!* I was horrified. In *my* experience a “librarian” was a bespectacled old grouch in a flower-print dress who despised little boys like myself and loved nothing better than kicking us out for whispering or giggling. Consequently, I decided to keep mum about the dark occupational suggestion *I’d* just received.

What a difference decades can make. I became a high school English teacher which, in retrospect, was apparently a “gateway drug” to the hardcore library clerk “lifestyle.” If anyone had ever told me back in high school that I’d end up being happy *happy as a bookworm* as a library clerk beginning in 2001, I would have immediately “unfriended” him. Of course, Facebook hadn’t been invented yet. Ironically, however, I found my soul-niche here.

Over the last 20 years I’ve developed so many diverse relationships, not only with my TFL co-workers but with the legions of patrons who’ve passed through our doors over the years as well. I’ve watched some of my previous high school students (rolling their *grandchildren* before them in strollers) sign in as adult patrons. I’ve watched newborn babies grow up before my eyes, receive their own library cards, and then disappear into the sunset on their way off to college or to careers. (Hey, I even got to watch our newest hire, Alex Shaffer, do some growing up (from seventh grade on) before boomeranging back here in his new, official capacity as Val’s replacement).



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(“*QUE SERA, SERA*” continued)

OK, for various reasons I’ve seriously had to address the fact that the time for me to retire has finally arrived, in spite of *me*. You may have heard, however, that I’m dragging my feet just a bit, planning as I am to do a few hours a week as a volunteer for at least a little while. It’s just that I love this place so much, and have been so blessed with this two-decades opportunity to have old, new, local, and snowbird friends visit with us at the counter to trade stories, smiles, laughter and sometimes even tears over the years. I’ve so often said that I’ve felt like a “bartender” (of *books*) (stationed as I’ve been behind the big bar-like circulation desk) and that TFL has felt so much like the famous *Cheers* bar... where everybody knows your name, and *we’re* always glad you came. (Thank goodness, I failed at becoming a jet pilot!)

Please know that I have so many wonderful memories here and, if you’re reading this newsletter, then chances are you’re probably a part of some of them.

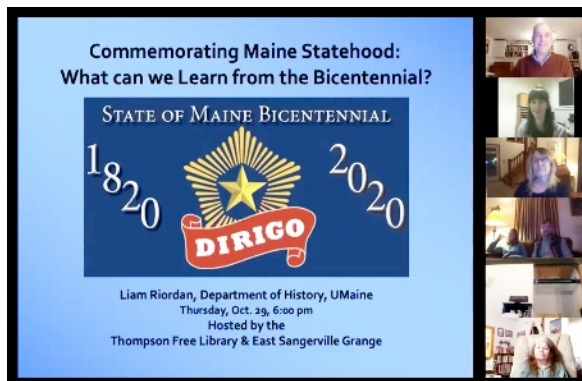
So anyone, this is it, my “official,” bittersweet goodbye. Bless all of you wonderful people. It’s been quite a ride...

*Sunrise, sunset...sunrise, sunset... swiftly go the days...*

#### *STATE OF MAINE* by Kim Brawn

On Thursday, October 29 Liam Riordan, UMaine history professor, hosted an enthusiastic and detailed online program called “Commemorating Maine Statehood: What can we Learn from the Bicentennial?”

TFL partnered with the East Sangerville Grange to co-sponsor this well-received online event. His presentation underscored how 1820 and 2020 remain connected in many ways.



Grange Master Dyan McCarthy Clark introduced Liam. She set the stage with an interesting perspective, “A lot of people think we study history so we don’t make the same mistakes, I would prefer to say that it helps us to put context on where we are now and where we’re going to go in the future. I like to put a positive spin on what history is all about.”

Liam divided his lively presentation into four parts: Slavery and Maine? National Crisis 1819-1821, Voting & Partisan Anger, Regional Diversity & Unknown International Border, and What did Maine Statehood Mean for Wabanaki Sovereignty? Perils & Persistence. He then delved deeper into each topic, unearthing little known facts including how various parts of the state felt about independence. “It was a controversial and

worrisome issue at the time,” he said.

Former TFL director Greta Schroeder was excited to host Liam “because he has been so active in the commemoration of the Maine Bicentennial, giving his time to organize events and talks at so many libraries across the state.”

“I loved that his talk was not just celebratory of the bicentennial, but it examined some of the more complicated aspects of Maine gaining statehood,” said Greta. And, as Dyan said in her introduction, it helps us understand “how we got to be where we are today and what our role was and to appreciate our identity as Mainers and the state of Maine.”

It seems only fitting that the East Sangerville Grange was involved with this program, as granges have been an important part of Maine’s history since the 1800s. Greta pointed out that libraries and reading were encouraged in grange halls, as well as debates on a multitude of topics of interest to their members.

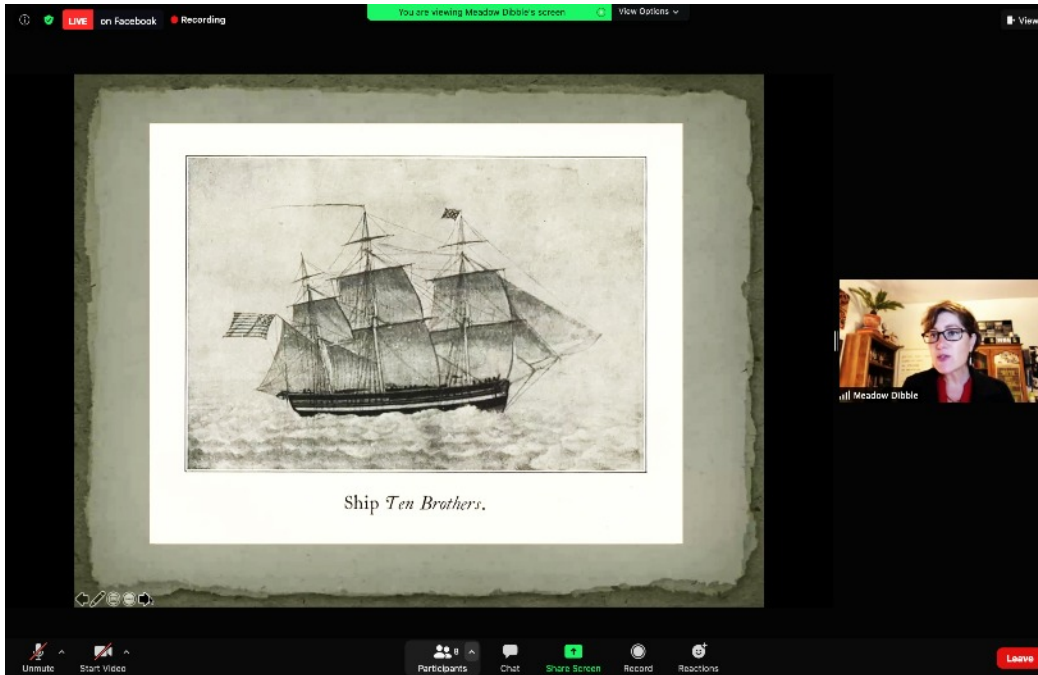
(You can watch or re-watch Liam’s talk at <https://youtu.be/uDUI-EMW4rs>)

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#### *THE DISEASED SHIP* by Kim Brawn



Another example of the powers of collaboration to bring incredible and informative programs to the public was “The Diseased Ship: New England Sea Captains and the Slave Trade, A World in Your Library Program” from the Maine Humanities Council. This November 19 talk by Meadow Dibble, brought together TFL partnering with the Margaret Chase Smith Foundation, the Commons at Central Hall, and Atlantic Black Box. The event was held via Zoom and the Commons also streamed it live on Facebook to increase accessibility and viewership.

Researcher Meadow Dibble told the dramatic story of a prominent Yankee sea captain, a viral outbreak, a major political cover up,

and a conspiracy of silence that’s lasted two centuries surrounding New England’s involvement in the slave trade.

Meadow launched Atlantic Black Box in 2018 as a public history initiative devoted to researching and reckoning with New England’s role in the slave trade and recovering the stories of the regions free and enslaved communities of color. Her impressive investigation shines a spotlight on the region’s repressed history of complicity with the business of slavery against a backdrop of yellow fever and how it relates to our current conversations about race and privilege.

TFL’s Michelle Fagan, also a board member at the Commons, said, “We were looking for something to spark interest and this program involved both New England and a pandemic.”

It’s a fascinating tale with many twists and turns that reveals so much more about our country’s history. “Meadow is very knowledgeable,” said Michelle, “And there was an interesting tie to my childhood hometown. *The Ten Brothers* (The Diseased Ship) was built in Sullivan, Maine.”

Part of what inspired Meadow’s passion for the topic is that the ship’s captain, Elijah Cobb, was from her hometown of Brewster, MA. She learned from his own writings that he stood accused of contraband slave trading and knowingly bringing the plague to Boston.

In her presentation, Meadow uncovers and unravels the connections and implications of this complicated and important story.

(Watch or Re-watch The Diseased Ship here: <https://youtu.be/g49gE9ua6nA>)



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#### *SUSTAINABLE LIVING RESOURCES* by Kim Brawn



TFL received \$550 from the Rose and Samuel Rudman Grant to expand and diversify our collection of sustainable living resources. As a rural library, we serve many community members who want to develop a more self-sufficient, sustainable lifestyle. With this grant we were able to update our collection and include a wider range of informational, do-it-yourself resources for the home and farm.

Greta Schroeder, TFL's former director, said that we "chose to focus on this area because our community includes many people who farm or garden and are interested in self-reliant, earth-friendly living. Books on these topics circulate regularly so adding 30 more titles will be great."

Topics include goats, chickens, the climate crisis, seed saving, homemade skin care products, off the grid DIY projects, family homesteading, foraging,

gardening/farming, growing food for free, food preservation, living w/out plastic, composting, reducing waste, and craft brewing.

One recent addition is *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* an essay collection from Robin Wall Kimmerer, a botanist and member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation. In the book she reveals, "People often ask me what one thing I would recommend to restore relationship between land and people. My answer is almost always, 'Plant a garden.' It's good for the health of the earth and good for the health of people."

These books feature ideas, projects, and practices that you can experiment with and actually incorporate into your life, leading to a potentially healthier world for humans, animals, and the planet.

In April, TFL will partner with Piscataquis Regional Food Center to display these books along with resources about their Garden in a Box initiative. No need to wait until spring, most are on the shelves now.

#### *WAKELET* by Kim Brawn

Be sure to check out our Wakelet page on the TFL website (<https://www.thompson.lib.me.us>). Wakelet is a sharing and curating platform with a website and app that lets you collect ideas, information, photos, videos, etc. in one place. "It's a great way to collect lots of different things on a topic and share them in one space," said librarian Michelle Fagan. "It's a user-friendly way to get people information in an organized way...I'm a list person so I'm a big fan."

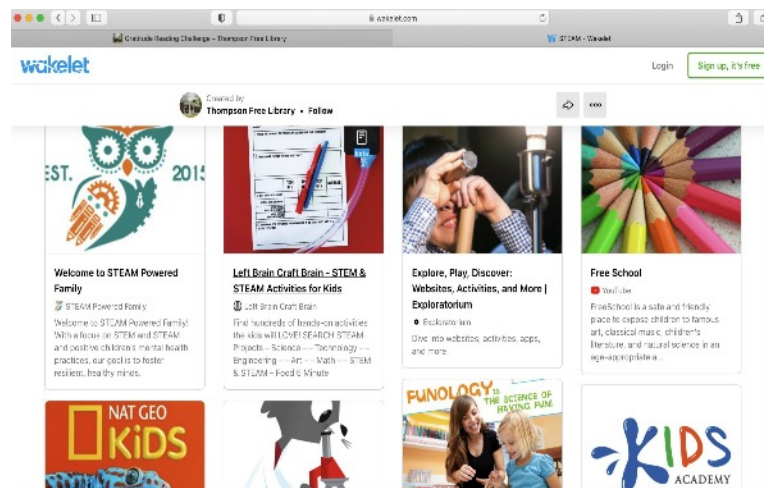
But it's not your usual list of links, rather a visually appealing array of mixed media, you get to see a preview and then click to go deeper. Each section on the page is called a collection.

As of now, Michelle has created these collections: Books on Gratitude, Finding Facts in Misinformation, Diverse Book Lists & Resources for All Ages, STEAM activities, Women's Suffrage, and Homeschooling.

To create your own Wakelet you do need to sign up on the website or the app. But to just view TFL's Wakelet, simply access it through our website by clicking on the Wakelet logo located down on the right side of our homepage.

Each collection is brimming with ideas and tips and info. And the best part? It's all in one place. It's never been easier to save, organize, and share content from across the web.

(If you're already on Wakelet or decide to sign up, follow us @ThompsonFreeLibrary1)





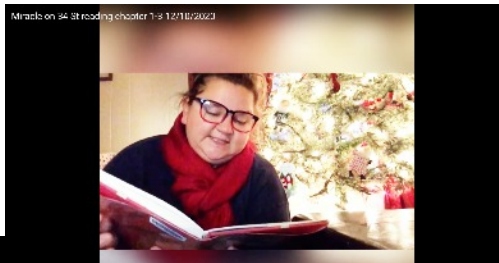
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PHOTO

GALLERY



*Our Kids Christmas Decoration Scavenger Hunt was a success with many families participating and eager to choose their free holiday book for completing the hunt.*

*Ms. Michelle (accompanied by scene stealer Ms. Olive) read Miracle on 34th Street and shared it on our Facebook page.*



*We gave Greta, Val, and Tom a COVID-safe goodbye send off. Val and Tom are retiring (Val and her husband, Scott, are moving to Hampden, Tom has become a volunteer at TFL and will continue to be involved in various library projects, and Greta is exploring other opportunities.)*



*Tuesday mornings are busy even before we open the doors—checking in quarantined books that our dedicated volunteers will reshelve.*

