

THOMPSON FREE LIBRARY

Quarterly Newsletter



APRIL 2021

Seed Library Taking Root

By Jon Knepp

Spring has sprung at the Thompson Free Library! With warm weather hinting at the start of the growing season, it's time to go outside, dig in the dirt, and work towards a beautiful flower or bountiful vegetable garden.

TFL's Seed Library can help provide you with enough resources to get started or broaden your horizons in the rewarding world of gardening. Seed quantities are limited, but over twenty types of seeds are featured. There are also mystery grab bags available which contain generous donations from area residents. What could be inside? Tomatoes? Marigolds? Parsnips? All three? How old are the seeds? 2018? 2020? Will they even grow? Only one way to find out!

What's also fun is that the seed library brings back an old friend—the card catalog—to organize and easily distribute the seeds while also providing a walk down memory lane. (We have many card catalogs sitting in the basement collecting dust, while we're glad to not be typing thousands of cards per year, we hate to see them go to waste.)



TFL is working with other local organizations to promote their related projects and provide additional resources to help would-be-gardeners of all ages. Fedco, Ripley Farms, and Piscataquis County Cooperative Extension office have contributed seeds to the project already. Other collaborative efforts include coloring books and tree and plant sale catalogs from the Piscataquis County Soil and Water Conservation District, Garden in a Box materials from the Piscataquis Regional Food Center, and publications from the Cooperative Extension Office. This project is the perfect opportunity to showcase some of the books highlighting

sustainable agriculture purchased with the help of a Rudman grant last year.

Seed libraries have been gaining popularity in recent years, allowing libraries of all sizes to increase their offerings to their customers beyond books. Patrons are encouraged to learn many valuable skills, perhaps the most important of which is seed saving. By returning some seeds each year to the seed library, the users help the project to become sustainable, while allowing the library to add to the diversity of offerings as time goes on.

The Thompson Free Seed Library is for accomplished green thumbs or aspiring ones!

High Marks for 'Lowering Days'

By Kim Brawn

Take a richly-layered immersive story of three families—their conflicts and resentments—in a fictional seaside town on Maine's Penobscot Bay, add a thoughtful and articulate author, a genuinely curious host who actually read the book, and a perceptive and attentive audience. What do you end up with? An engaging discussion of Greg Brown's debut novel, *The Lowering Days*, via Zoom on the last Monday evening in March.

"The program went great. I thought the book was amazing and Greg was very interesting, so I think that helped make the event really enjoyable," said host Jon Knepp, TFL's director. "I was surprised at how many people attended and that some of them had already read the book. That led to great questions and input during the Q and A section of the talk."

While the book has received many positive reviews from national media and acclaimed authors like Richard Russo, Jon thought his wife Kazia's review summed things up best: "She said, 'I slowed down reading the book because I wanted to spend more time in this world.'" Greg beamed with appreciation



Lowering Days author, Gregory Brown

at that description.

Kazia, who attended the talk, told me that "it was great to hear Greg read his work aloud and explain more about the setting, his writing practice, and some of the subjects in the book."

"The thing I most loved about the book was the power of the story's location. He creates a setting that inspires a sense of wonder and reverence." Set in 1980s Maine the book explores family love, the power of myths and storytelling, survival and environmental exploitation, and the ties between cultural identity and the land we live on. One of the main themes, as Greg noted, is the "interplay between landscape & the human lives that it

holds."

Besides reading several evocative passages, Greg played an excerpt from the audio book featuring the Penobscot woman who voices "Molly"—the Penobscot teen who sets fire to the town's soon-to-be-reopened mill; an act that has many consequences and ripple effects. The speaker is also one of the indigenous people who helped Greg with Penobscot translation. In the powerful clip, "Molly" reads the letter she wrote to the local paper explaining why she set the fire. First in her native language, then in English.

Twenty-two people came to the discussion. The chat was active, with many comments and questions. Others unmutted themselves and spoke directly with Greg. Topics ranged from his focus on the natural and spiritual worlds, the role of the Vietnam War in the character's lives, small town cycles of resentment, anger and trauma, and how members of the Penobscot Nation have received the book.

Greg, who grew up in Belfast and currently lives in Casco, came across as bright, compassionate, and reflective. He proved to be his own best publicist, as many left eager to get their hands on a copy of the book. (We have two copies at TFL!)

What a Hoot!

By Kim Brawn

There is something intriguing about owls. Whether it's Hedwig delivering breaking news to Harry Potter or watching their mesmerizing almost-silent flying on PBS' Nature, we love their distinctive faces and dramatic head spins. On February 17 via Zoom, Chewonki, the Wiscasset-based environmental education organization, hosted a popular program with live owls.

"I always love seeing the owls up close. They are so beautiful and alert, very fun to watch," said youth services librarian Michelle Fagan, who coordinated the

program.

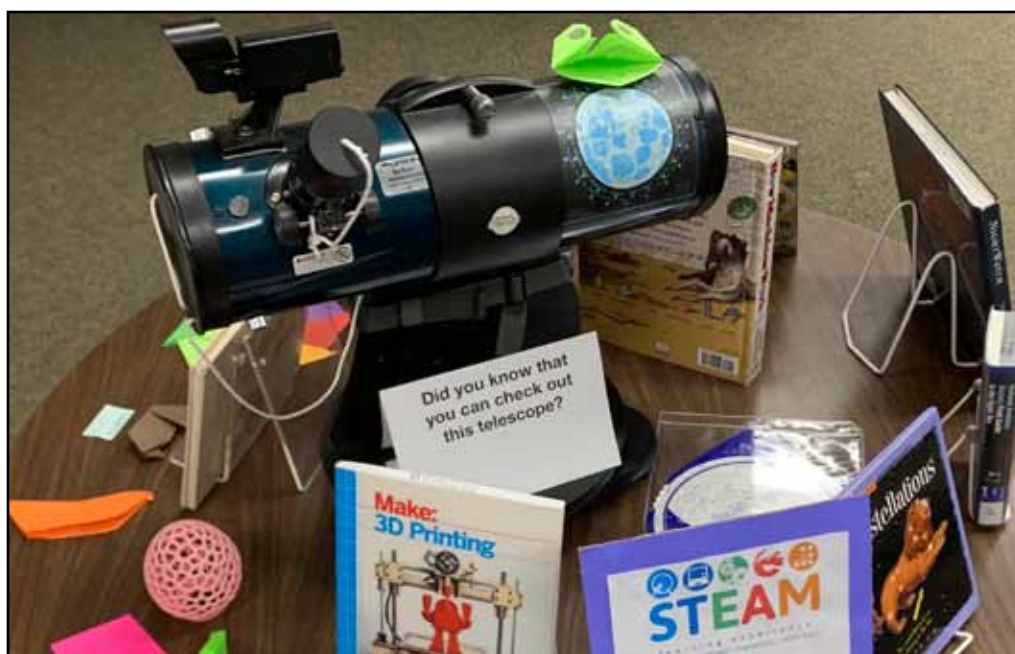
The 13 people attending, adults and children, learned identifying calls and characteristics of these incredible creatures of the night. "Seeing what owl ears look like is cool, most people don't know that they are flat and inside the heads, they think the tufts on most owls' heads are ears," said Michelle.

TFL cataloguer Alex Shaffer said he "enjoyed being able to learn about the different owls that frequent Maine." He, like Michelle, loved seeing the owls up close, especially the barred owl, which he has spotted during the day near his Sebec home. (Check out his cool pic on our Instagram account!)

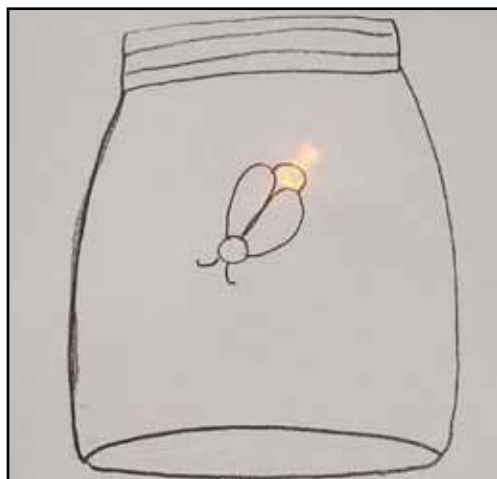
Chewonki, known for in-person TFL kids' programs in summers past, gives children a better appreciation for the natural world and these mysterious birds of the woods who (hoo?) are usually heard but not seen.



Chewonki via Zoom



Alicia's STEAM displays and kits shine the spotlight on science, technology, 3D printing, fossils, astronomy, and more!



Full STEAM Ahead!

By Kim Brawn

TFL's STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, & Math) guru Alicia Millette has created interactive kits that have been flying off the table at the library. With in-person programs on pause until better weather arrives, take home kits have been a big hit!

"To date, I have made a total of 10 different STEAM Kits and we have had 180+ kits taken out," said Alicia.

The kits have featured projects on the lungs, hovercraft, fingerprints, yeast, firefly LED, origami, and color changing carnations. So what makes the cut?

"Everything has to have a visual appeal. I try and think about what things kids can relate to and what would capture their interest," Alicia said. "They're meant to be engaging for the whole family."

"Making examples of a project is key," Alicia explains. "It's one thing to see it in a book and another to see that someone's actually made it—it gives kids confidence that they can do it themselves."

Patrons and visitors of all ages have been fascinated by the kits and appreciative of them. "The reactions have been fun to watch," said Alicia.

When she's not busy creating new take home kits (which are located next to the circulation desk), she is upgrading the 3D printer to start a 3D printer campaign for patrons.

(BTW: Do you have any extra Mason jars lying around? Please donate them for Alicia's ongoing chemistry crystal growing kits. We want to provide as many of the supplies needed so everyone can do the experiments.)

(P.S.: We would love to see your finished projects—please share on our Facebook page or on Instagram @tf_library!)

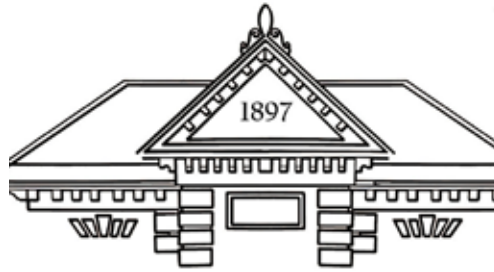
Open on Saturdays!

By Kim Brawn

Since January 23, TFL has been open again on Saturdays from 9 a.m.-1 p.m., with COVID safety protocols in place. Library director Jon Knepp wanted to give those who work during the week, individuals and families, more access to the benefits and resources of the library.

“We have tried to strike a balance during the pandemic,” as Jon put it, “Weighing the needs of our patrons with the health and safety of us all.”

It’s been fun to see some new, as well



NOW OPEN SATURDAY 9-1!

as long-absent, eyes and voices (masks make you rely on other senses and cues!) on Saturday, with people grateful for the weekend hours.

If you are out doing errands on a

Saturday, be sure to add TFL to your list. It’s the perfect time to pick up something to read or watch for the weekend, use a computer, or take advantage of our copying, printing (including wireless), and faxing services.

Questions about our COVID protocols? Please contact the library. And remember, we still offer curbside service during business hours. Whether we’re open or not, if you’re just dropping items off, please use the outdoor book box on the side of the building. Another reminder: Free WiFi is available 24/7 in the TFL parking lot!

The Stories We Tell

By Kim Brawn

Each Voices from Home/TFL Story Slam has a theme. The last one at the end of January was Hindsight (as in hindsight is 2020). No matter the topic, story slam coordinator Michelle Fagan says they’re really about connection and connectedness. While the initial slams were held in person in 2019, the majority have been held online via Zoom, making them in some ways even more accessible and convenient.

“I always enjoy the story slams because it’s so nice to feel the connection it brings to the audience. The Hindsight slam was well attended and filled with wonderful stories,” said Michelle. “You get a glimpse of community members that you might never get to see if you didn’t go to the slam.”

It’s an incredible way to share stories within our community. If you have a true, 4–8minute story to share on the program’s topic, that’s wonderful. If not, we encourage you to just watch and listen. Who knows, a story might bubble up in you as you hear others’ words.

Hindsight was TFL director Jon Knepp’s first time attending a story slam,



“It was great!”

Jon admits he was worried about having to share a story as he was blanking on anything related to the subject but there were plenty of stories. His message for the uninitiated, “Don’t worry, you don’t have to come with a story, and no one is going to put you on the spot—it’s low pressure, welcoming, and very friendly.”

Michelle agrees, “They are an inviting, open, accepting place to share—we need more of the that in the world!”

Growth is the theme of the next Story Slam to be held on Friday, April 23 at 6 p.m. via Zoom. To get your memories and creative juices flowing, think of the

new growth in spring that will soon be all around us. What has shaped or fed your personal growth? How did you grow into the person you are today, maybe a story about gardening, or about growing up? What situations or environments helped you grow?

There will also be an online Storytelling workshop called *Express Yourself* led by local playwright, director, and Story Slam host/contributor Bobby Keniston on Tuesday, April 20 at 2 p.m. geared towards teens and young adults. For more details and Zoom links, please contact the library (thompsonfreelibrary@gmail.com) or visit our Facebook page.

Explore the Great Outdoors...Through Books It's Still Cold and Muddy Out

By Jon Knepp

March is maple syrup season in the Maine woods and April, while still cold, brings ice breaking up on the waterways in the area. So, it's the perfect time for the TFL Book Club to meet with two local authors whose books delve into those topics. Claire Ackroyd's *Murder in the Maple Woods* is a murder mystery set in the sugar camps north of Jackman. Laurie Apgar Chandler's *Through Woods and Waters* is a travelogue detailing her canoe/hiking trip through the Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument.

Claire Ackroyd pitched the concept of this book talk to me, describing herself and Laurie Apgar Chandler as "two femmes d'un certain âge with stories to tell about the Maine Woods." We already had Claire's book at the library and, being a would-be paddler "from away," I was also intrigued by Laurie's book. I decided to give the book talk a shot.

I was not disappointed, both of these books are great! *Murder in the Maple Woods* is not your typical mystery. Not many cozies take place in the numbered townships north of Jackman, but the depth of Claire's knowledge of the syrup industry is really what stuck out to me. It's as much a first-hand account of the Quebecois' yearly invasion of Northern Maine's sugarbush as it is a who-dunnit.

Through Woods and Waters was a surprisingly rapid (paddling joke!) read. I expected the book to be a fairly straightforward account of the journey, highlighted by running tallies of moose encountered and species of waterfowl. There is some of that, but the book is so much more! Laurie has done incredible research in writing this book. She paints a natural history of the area, adds in the

ways humans have altered the fate of the area around Katahdin, and then places it all in the context of her trip. The historical facts about Percival Baxter, geological tidbits about glacial erratics, and the truth about where Bambi is set (read the book to find out more!) both kept me reading and sent me away from the book, down wormholes on the internet, eager to learn more.

After a preliminary meeting to discuss *Murder in the Maple Woods* and create some good questions in March, the Book Club met with the femmes de la forêt on 8 avril. (I'm stretching the limits of my Francais with this article) We had a lot of things stacked against us. It was the first beautiful spring afternoon. Laurie was in Boston recovering from eye surgery. Claire's camera refused to work at first. The cleaners showed up at the library and started vacuuming as soon as the talk started. The universe seemed to be working against us!

Despite all of the ill omens, we had a tremendously enjoyable talk! Laurie shared a slideshow of her favorite spots on her voyage. Claire explained the maple syrup production process and how she ended up in Maine all the way from England. They then answered questions the group had compiled, touching even more in depth on some of the most memorable aspects of their books and lives.

In the end, it was great for those of us in the group to meet the authors of the books that had gotten us through the last dregs of winter and the start of spring. Claire and Laurie appreciated all the positive feedback from avid readers from the part of Maine where their books were set. Now that spring has finally sprung and (hopefully) the last of the snow is behind us, it's time to get out there in the great outdoors and explore. Still, probably best to bring a book with you, the weather can turn for the worse quickly!



Just Browsing

By Kim Brawn

One positive that has come from this challenging time has been the focus on giving patrons a better online experience browsing new books, in real-time, as they become part of the collection. The Browse Bookshelves link on our website (<https://www.thompson.lib.me.us>) has been a work in progress since its inception.

And it's one of first projects TFL director Jon Knepp tackled after coming on board. I asked Jon what makes this feature new and improved.

"The Bookshelf App updates itself now. As we add in books to the collection, they are automatically posted on the app," he explained. "Also, thanks to a fix I helped work out with the developer on the backend, images for nearly every book and DVD will be automatically added. Previously, less than half of the new books had an image."

Not only do new books scroll across the screen, so do the most popular titles at TFL. "Most Popular helps to highlight some of the books and DVDs that everyone wants. Some of them come in and go out so quickly that a lot of patrons may never even see them on the shelves," said Jon.

Ok, let's be honest, sometimes we do judge a book by its cover. A new release might jump out at you because of the cover; the visuals can give you a clue or hint of what's on the pages. Not only is it fun to watch them scroll by, if an item interests you, just click for more details, check on availability, and it put on hold—all from the comfort of your own couch. (Contact TFL if you need help setting up an online account.)

Right: Don't forget Ms. Michelle's Story Time! She reads picture books and posts the video to our Facebook page on most Thursdays. Michelle truly shines in this role and Story Time—even online—has so many benefits for the little ones!

Below: C'mon get hoppy & happy with Ms. Michelle's spring-themed take home crafts!



Jon from PA schooled us Mainers in all the intriguing facets & backstories of Groundhog Day with his delightful Instagram series. Our friends and followers were treated to an insider's look behind the scenes of this vastly underrated holiday!



Listen to your inner sloth: there's always time for a good book! (This fun bulletin board is courtesy of the creative minds & talented hands of Barbara Lockwood and Ms. Michelle.)

Photo Gallery



Even we couldn't resist the ubiquitous Bernie meme! Kim took this shot of Bernie's late January visit (wink-wink) & Alicia gave us this giggle-inducing mini 3D Bernie perched atop the plexiglass at the circulation desk!

