
Section Four: Story as Institutional Culture

Both of the presentations that end this collection speak to concerns for the future of stories and storytelling. In the past, the only way to know a story was to hear it, to be connected to it by blood or proximity. As literacy evolved, traditional stories were captured, indeed rescued from oblivion, by the collectors and folklorists who gathered stories in print form. Now stories span huge distances via many forms of media, and children in the U.S. can go to their local library—or to the vast reaches of cyberspace—and read and hear stories from Brazil or the Philippines, from Vietnam or Russia or Nigeria. The ones they love they may tell or enact or reread. Thus stories go from print to oral and back again. This an activity that has kept, and continues to keep, stories alive. And libraries provide the stories that fuel this interaction for current and future generations of children and of storytellers. Children’s librarians are certainly not the only storytellers out there, but by virtue of their role in both the promotion of stories and of reading, their collections become the gateway through which the child can enter the world of story again and again.

Christine Jenkins’ essay reminds us that stories and storytelling are not only part of humankind’s past and present, but part of our future as well. Stories—whether ancient, modern, postmodern, or only a gleam in a storyteller’s eye—survive. Janice Del Negro’s essay, actually a speech inspired by the 39th Allerton Conference (thus, included here) and given a week later as the keynote address at the Champaign Public Library Children’s Literature Conference, reminds us of both the “how” and the “why” of helping children make this essential connection.