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## Write Us into the Story

Archives and Archivists in Narratives for Children

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# Write Us into the Story

## Archives and Archivists in Narratives for Children<sup>1</sup>

SHELLEY SWEENEY  
AND CHERYL AVERY

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**ABSTRACT** Archivists need to increase public understanding, support, and engagement in archives to enable archives to fulfil their missions. As one way to increase support, archives have increasingly carved out time and resources for various types of outreach. One important audience that has long been acknowledged is children. In the past, archivists have visited classrooms, brought children to archives, and prepared kits of archival facsimiles or surrogates on websites for children to use with the guidance of teachers. But another way to reach children includes narratives in books, films, and television directed at children. This article explores a number of titles to see whether archives and archivists are accurately portrayed in the narratives. The numbers are few, and the portrayals are generally weak. Two exceptions were books created by an archivist and commissioned by an archives. These two approaches led to significant works that enhance children's understanding of archives and archivists and lead the way as examples for future archival endeavours to emulate.

<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Isabelle Alain, Angela Fornelli, Tim Hutchinson, Colleen McEwan, Tom Nesmith, Jane Nokes, Christopher Nokes, Michael Piggott, David Rajotte, Joanna Sassoon, Rhiannon Wallace, and Alexandra Wieland for their helpful tips about materials featuring archives and archivists.

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**RÉSUMÉ** Les archivistes doivent faire croître la compréhension, le soutien et l'engagement du public à l'égard des archives pour permettre à celles-ci de remplir leur mission. Pour accroître ce soutien, les archives consacrent de plus en plus de temps et de ressources à divers types d'actions de sensibilisation. Un public important, reconnu depuis longtemps, est celui des enfants. Par le passé, les archivistes ont visité des classes, amené des enfants aux archives et préparé des trousseaux de reproductions d'archives ou de substituts sur des sites web pour que les enfants puissent les utiliser avec l'aide d'enseignants. Mais une autre façon d'atteindre les enfants est d'utiliser des récits dans des livres, des films et des émissions de télévision destinés aux enfants. Cet article explore un certain nombre de titres pour voir si les archives et les archivistes sont dépeints correctement dans ces récits. Les chiffres sont bas, et les représentations sont généralement faibles. Deux exceptions : des livres créés par un archiviste et commandés par un service d'archives. Ces deux approches ont donné lieu à des ouvrages importants qui permettent aux enfants de mieux comprendre les archives et les archivistes et qui constituent des exemples à suivre pour les futures initiatives en matière d'archives.

*There is only one thing in the world worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about.*

–Oscar Wilde<sup>2</sup>

There is ample evidence and writing to support the notion that archivists need to increase public understanding, support, and engagement in archives to enable archives to fulfil their missions.<sup>3</sup> As one way to increase support, archives have increasingly carved out time and resources for various types of outreach. One important audience that has long been acknowledged is children.<sup>4</sup> Children will, in effect, become future users, future resource allocators, future advocates. And lessons that children learn at an early age will likely be retained for the rest of their lives.

Librarians have been particularly successful in introducing young children to the rules of using libraries and inculcating the value of libraries among the general population through the use of libraries. Arguably, they have done so primarily through school libraries and secondarily through children’s programming in public libraries. In a report to the Canadian Library Association (CLA) executive, one of the value propositions regarding school libraries suggested, “There are many kids who won’t get the habit of going to a library, finding something to read, and signing out a book, unless it’s at their school library. . . . It means that any child can go and have that experience, and go often enough to make it a lifelong habit.”<sup>5</sup>

Early exposure to libraries may or may not result in a lifetime habit of reading, but it certainly establishes familiarity with the concept of the “library” and its protocols and an understanding of how the library organizes its holdings –

2 Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (New York: G. Wells, 1925), 11.

3 See, for example, Gabrielle Blais and David Enns, “From Paper Archives to People Archives: Public Programming in the Management of Archives,” *Archivaria* 31 (Winter 1990–91): 101–13; Craig Heron, “Archives: Public Awareness and Engagement,” *Archivaria* 78 (Fall 2014): 149–52; George Bain, John Fleckner, Kathy Marquis, and Mary Pugh, “Reference, Access, and Outreach: An Evolved Landscape, 1936–2011,” in “Session 406,” supplement, *American Archivist* 74, no. S1 (2011): 1–40.

4 For the sake of this article, we define children as individuals who are 12 years of age or younger.

5 Alvin M. Schrader and Michael R. Brundin, *National Statistical and Values Profile of Canadian Libraries: Report to CLA Executive Council* ([Ottawa]: Canadian Library Association, 2012), 12, <https://cla.ca/wp-content/uploads/NationalValuesProfileCanadianLibrariesReportfinal.pdf>.

although not, alas, any clear understanding of what a librarian does. In contrast, it is likely that students will *not* have much exposure to archives as part of the formal education system before arriving at university, and even then, only a very small percentage of university students will be introduced to an archives. A recent report on the gallery, library, archives, and museum (GLAM) sector quantified the “value of GLAMs [sic] formal educational benefits,” in part, by identifying the “number of school children visits or educational sessions per annum.” Libraries were highest, at 4.26 million visits; museums were next, at 3.97 million; and galleries had 1.36 million. Archives were last, at 0.13 million visits.<sup>6</sup>

Archivists have struggled particularly with reaching children but have long known about the need to reach out to young people. In the past, archivists and educators have primarily focused on bringing children to archives or having archivists visit schools, preparing kits of facsimiles that teachers and students could use in the schools on their own or preparing scans of materials delivered through websites. In the early 1960s, for example, John Langdon-Davies created the Jackdaw series of history learning aids for school children in England. These kits were composed of individual facsimile documents, newspaper clippings, maps, and photos that were selected specifically to explore different themes that would be appropriate for students in school. Today, Jackdaws are produced by an American company that touts itself as the “world’s largest educational primary source materials company”<sup>7</sup> and now specializes in American history. The Jackdaw on the Trail of Tears, for example, illuminates the brutal march of members of various Indigenous peoples from their homes to forced resettlement in the state of Oklahoma. Along with instructional materials aimed at teachers are eight historical documents for children, including a front page of the *Cherokee Phoenix* from February 21, 1828; the *Indian Removal Act*, dated May 28, 1830; and a map of the Trail of Tears from 1838 to 1839. Most of the materials in Jackdaw kits are ephemera such as broadsides, excerpts of government documents, engravings, and the odd letter. The materials are selected by historians.

Ken Osborne, a professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg and a former editor of the *History and Social Science*

6 Oxford Economics, *Value Study of Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums (GLAMs) in Canada: Report for the Ottawa Declaration Working Group* (New York: n.p., 2019), 52, [https://museums.ca/site/reportsandpublications/studyglamscanada2020?language=en\\_CA](https://museums.ca/site/reportsandpublications/studyglamscanada2020?language=en_CA).

7 Jackdaw Publications (website), accessed February 28, 2021, <https://www.jackdaw.com/default.aspx>.

*Teacher*, discussed the early history of archivists' attempts to reach children in Canada.<sup>8</sup> He noted that archives developed collections of lantern slides based on their historical materials and archivists made occasional school visits. W. Kaye Lamb, the Dominion Archivist of Canada, produced a series of publications that were designed primarily as teaching aids for elementary and high school use.<sup>9</sup> Writing in 1997, however, Sharon Cook, a professor and Director of Teacher Education in the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa and the wife of archival theorist Terry Cook, noted, "There has been relatively little progress in producing coherent or prominent programmes."<sup>10</sup> She added that such educational programs that did exist really depended upon "one person's enthusiasm and willingness to devote extra time" to serve educators.<sup>11</sup>

Today, a number of large archival institutions have robust programs for school children who visit the archives.<sup>12</sup> The school class tours at the Archives of Manitoba, for example, introduce students to "the rich documentary heritage" held by the Archives and provide an overview of the Archives' research room operations and exhibitions and the Hudson's Bay Company Archives display vault.<sup>13</sup> The National Archives in the United States provides for both individuals and groups of children at its Boeing Learning Center, where children can drop in for "hands-on activities with replica documents, images, maps, posters and more from the holdings of the National Archives."<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, the centre has a themed story time, complete with crafts and other group activities, for children 3 to 5 years of age. The resources needed to provide such intensive services to children, however, are significant and out of reach for most smaller institutions.

A different way to reach children, which is not as labour intensive as educational programs and which reaches a much broader audience, is through

8 Ken Osborne, "Archives in the Classroom," *Archivaria* 23 (Winter 1986–87): 16–40.

9 Public Archives of Canada, *Report for the Year 1949* (Ottawa: [Public Archives of Canada], 1950), xxxiii, as quoted in Osborne, "Archives in the Classroom."

10 Sharon Anne Cook, "Connecting Archives and the Classroom," *Archivaria* 44 (Fall 1997): 104.

11 Cook, "Connecting Archives," 105.

12 However, most school programs have been disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

13 Archives of Manitoba, "Tours," accessed September 13, 2021, <https://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/archives/visiting/tours.html>.

14 National Archives, "Visiting with Children," National Archives Museum, accessed September 13, 2021, <https://museum.archives.gov/visiting-children>.

narratives conveyed by books, films, and television. Through these narratives, children can become aware of archives and archivists. We might ask if children are able to understand the basic concepts of archives, records, and memory and whether those concepts can be conveyed through narrative. Recent scholarship that indicates that narrative plays an important role in cementing memories and understanding could apply here.<sup>15</sup> The ability to form – and retain – memories changes, but language and narrative play significant roles.<sup>16</sup> As Jeanne Shinskey, a lecturer in psychology at Royal Holloway, University of London, notes, “unlike simply recounting information for factual purposes, reminiscing revolves around the social function of sharing experiences with others. . . . Maori adults have the earliest childhood memories (age 2.5) of any society studied so far, thanks to Maori parents’ highly elaborative style of telling family stories.”<sup>17</sup> Similarly, while recognizing their diversity, we might look to North American Indigenous cultures and the role of Knowledge Keepers and Elders within those cultures. Guidance from the Wicihitowin Conference Committee emphasizes, “As the caretakers of generations of Indigenous knowledge, Traditional Knowledge Keepers are the foundation of Indigenous peoples’ societies.”<sup>18</sup> The role of Knowledge Keepers within Indigenous cultures is becoming understood to some degree even within settler society. An interesting example is that of the Cree and Michif language programs currently offered for students from pre-kindergarten through high school in Saskatoon. That language and culture are interwoven is acknowledged through the inclusion in this program of “kêhtêyak (old ones/elders) who are the knowledge keepers of origin and history, which provides a foundation of values and beliefs from a First Nations perspective.”<sup>19</sup>

15 Elaine Reese, Harlene Hayne, and Shelley MacDonald, “Looking Back to the Future: Māori and Pakeha Mother-Child Birth Stories,” *Child Development* 79, no. 1 (2008): 114–25; Tia Neha, Elaine Reese, Elizabeth Schaugency, Mele Taumoepeau, “The Role of Whānau (New Zealand Māori Families) for Māori Children’s Early Learning,” *Developmental Psychology* 56, no. 8 (2020): 1518–31.

16 Jeanne Shinskey, “This is Why We Can’t Remember Our Early Childhood Memories,” *The Conversation*, re-posted by CNN Health, August 13, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/08/13/health/childhood-memories-partner-wellness/index.html>.

17 Shinskey, “This is Why We Can’t Remember.”

18 The Wicihitowin Conference Committee, *Authentic Engagement of First Nations and Métis Traditional Knowledge Keepers* (n.p.: The Wicihitowin Conference Committee, 2017), 8, [https://uakn.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Wicihitowin\\_AuthenticEngagementBooklet\\_V8.pdf](https://uakn.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Wicihitowin_AuthenticEngagementBooklet_V8.pdf).

19 Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools, “Language Programs: Cree,” Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools, June 15, 2021, <https://www.gsccs.ca/page/72/cree>. See also Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools, “Language Programs:

What popular culture materials might introduce children to archives, archivists, and Knowledge Keepers? In his keynote address to the 1995 Australian Society of Archivists conference in Canberra, Australia, Richard Cox spoke of the “child’s view of archives” and gave a review of the state of writing for children about archives and archivists in the United States at that time.<sup>20</sup> Although he stated that there was “a voluminous body of children’s literature” based on archives and the historical record, not unexpectedly, there was no concomitant explanation of either the archival institutions or the archivists and their roles in providing those materials. Have things changed in the last quarter century?

If we turn to books, one of the few early examples cited by Cox was *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*, aimed at children about 6 to 10 years old.<sup>21</sup> Two children run away from home and sneak into the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where they live for a week and try to discover the answer to the mystery of who produced a statue the museum had recently acquired. Although a careful examination shows that Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler is really a historian, there is still a nod to archival records in the text. When discussing how experts would decide whether or not a statue was created by Michelangelo, Claudia says, “I know how they find out. They gather evidence like sketches he did in diaries and records of sales.”<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately, the word *archives* never appears.

More recently, there have been happier instances. *If These Places Could Talk: Snapshots of Saskatchewan*, by archivist Crista Bradley and with artwork by Wendi Nordell, was published in 2020.<sup>23</sup> The book is closely tied to the Saskatchewan curriculum and in a format approved by educators. Utilizing over 100 archival and contemporary photographs from archives, libraries, and museums of places around the province of Saskatchewan, this picture book is aimed at children from ages 4 to 10. All the images are identified as to where they were obtained, and

Michif,” Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools, August 11, 2021, <https://www.gscs.ca/page/73/michif>.

20 Richard J. Cox, “A Sense of the Future: A Child’s View of Archives,” in *Archivists, The Image and Future of the Profession: 1995 Conference Proceedings*, ed. Michael Piggott and Colleen McEwan (Canberra: Australian Society of Archivists, 1996).

21 E.L. Konigsburg, *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* (New York: Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2010), Kindle.

22 Konigsburg, Chapter 5, Kindle.

23 Crista Bradley, *If These Places Could Talk: Snapshots of Saskatchewan*, ill. Wendi Nordell (Regina: Your Nickel’s Worth Publishing, 2020). For a fuller description and review see Shelley Sweeney, “If These Places Could Talk: Snapshots of Saskatchewan,” *Archivaria* 91 (Spring/Summer 2021): 212–16.



there are two pages dedicated to archives and archivists, under “Places of Record.” There is a brief description of archives in Saskatchewan; explanations of what an archives is, what archivists do, and why archives matter; and information about where children or adults handling the book can find more information. This picture book was a labour of love, and the end result is a unique and delightful resource that conveys the importance of archives without belabouring the point.

In a children’s book by Christopher Nokes, architect and husband of Canadian archivist Jane Nokes, children are introduced to the stuffed animal and archivist Cee Bear: “CB is the People’s archivist. . . . He is our keeper of records.”<sup>24</sup> That is a nice, succinct description for younger children. The book follows up by introducing children to common types of historical records: “I have read about this place. It is in CB’s historical records. The photographs. The so-called Family Album.”<sup>25</sup> Cee Bear is also the other stuffed animals’ historian, recording the Five Legends in the Chronicles of Greenwood and frequently imparting knowledge from the archival materials in his care to the others. The origin of these records, CB notes, is a “great mystery.” Overall, the description of Cee Bear and the historical records he uses are a very good introduction for young readers. The book is aimed at readers at the grade 2 to 3 level.

*Blood in the Library*, from the Return to the Library of Doom series, is a graphic novel written by prolific children’s author Michael Dahl and illustrated by Bradford Kendall.<sup>26</sup> It is a so-called Hi-Lo book that has a high interest level and a low vocabulary or readability level, aimed at older children who have a reading level of grades 1 to 3. The story is about the Library of Doom: the world’s largest collection of deadly and dangerous books. Librarians are given a prominent place in this library. “Only the Librarian can prevent these books from falling into the hands of those who would use them for evil.”<sup>27</sup> Chapter 2, however, is quite prominently entitled, “THE ARCHIVISTS” (yes, using all capital letters). Hilariously, Alonso, the main character and a sub-sub-librarian working in the deepest level of the great library, hears echoing voices and peers through a window with metal bars. Dramatically, he sees shadows

<sup>24</sup> Christopher Nokes, *Chronicles of Greenwood: Book One: Exodus* (Pittsburgh, PA: Dorrance Publishing Company, 2017), Kindle.

<sup>25</sup> Nokes, Chapter 1, Kindle.

<sup>26</sup> Michael Dahl, *Blood in the Library*, ill. Bradford Kendall ([North Mankato, MN]: Capstone Press, 2011), Kindle.

<sup>27</sup> Dahl, Prologue, Kindle.

moving on the floor of the room, which turn out to be a circle of tall, thin men. “Alonso recognizes them. They are the ARCHIVISTS” (again, all capitals).<sup>28</sup> Amazingly, day and night, the archivists wander through the Library of Doom, never sleeping or eating and making sure that every book is in its place. They have a rather subservient position to the Librarian. If they notice one book missing, they report it to the Librarian. They argue with a young woman, who is called the Specialist, stating that the Librarian has disappeared. Interestingly, at the back, there is a glossary, and the first word is *archivist*. The definition is “someone whose job is to maintain archives or records,” which is not a bad explanation but does not square with the contents of the book.<sup>29</sup> Although it may be good that archivists are prominently mentioned in the book, given that they are basically shelvers in menacing attire, this book is somewhat of a step backwards.

*Raiders of the Lost Archives*, a title in Dahl’s *Secrets of the Library of Doom* series published in 2021, sounded more promising at first than his previous title.<sup>30</sup> The action takes place in what might be considered to be at least the storage room of an archives, and a young boy – a SILENT ONE (Michael Dahl is very fond of these capitalizations) – carries a box full of papers. When push comes to shove, however, the papers/archives turn into – the LIBRARIAN. The Raiders are pushed into the Lost Archive, which turns out to be a maze, where they are doomed to wander forever. At least the glossary provides a decent description of an archive: “a place where important papers and books are kept.”<sup>31</sup>

An interesting example on an Indigenous theme is a book aimed at children ages 9 to 12, entitled *The Case of the Missing Auntie*, by Michael Hutchinson.<sup>32</sup> Chickadee, a little girl and a member of the Mighty Muskrats, four cousins from the Windy Lake First Nation, wants to find out about her grandfather’s little

28 Dahl, Chapter 2, Kindle.

29 Dahl, Glossary, Kindle. In the end, Alonso saves the day and turns out to actually be the librarian who had disappeared at the beginning of the book.

30 Michael Dahl, *Raiders of the Lost Archives*, ill. Patricio Clarey (North Mankato, MN: Stone Arch Books, 2021).

31 Dahl, *Raiders of the Lost Archives*, [38].

32 Michael Hutchinson, *The Case of the Missing Auntie* (Toronto: Second Story Press, 2020). Hutchinson is a member of the Misipawistik Cree Nation, north of Winnipeg, who has written a series of books based on the Mighty Muskrats. “He has spent much of his career telling the stories of Indigenous peoples.” Second Story Press, “Michael Hutchinson,” Second Story Press, accessed September 13, 2021, <https://secondstorypress.ca/kids/thecaseofthemissingauntie>.

sister, who was taken by the Canadian government and adopted out to strangers as part of the Sixties Scoop. When she runs into problems finding information at an adoption registry in Winnipeg, she is sent to another set of offices. While one might consider the “post-adoption archive offices” Chickadee visits as a classic example of Western colonial bureaucracy, they are more a cluster of government offices, such as Vital Statistics, than an archives. The supervisor refuses to share any information without Chickadee’s great-aunt Charlotte’s birth date, which Chickadee does not know. A junior staff member saves the day by helping Chickadee fill out the form to get information and then sending her to visit the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR) to get the missing information that will unlock the records. “That’s where they keep a lot of the information on residential schools.”<sup>33</sup>

Thus, the Mighty Muskrats head to the NCTR on the University of Manitoba campus. Quite an accurate picture of the NCTR adorns the cover of the book. Once there, the cousins receive an explanation of what the NCTR houses: “We maintain a lot of the records and files that have been collected from residential schools.”<sup>34</sup> The Muskrats also find out how they can look for documents in the databases. Disappointingly, the person helping them is not an archivist or an archives assistant and is not identified as such. The young woman says that her education is in research and history.

Hutchinson’s book, which focuses on archives and is written from an Indigenous perspective, is virtually unique. In addition, however, there are a relatively small number of books that specifically make Knowledge Keepers central to conveying the narrative of the stories. For instance, when *The Mishomis Book: The Voice of the Ojibway* was initially published in 1988, author Edward Benton-Banai believed that he had produced “the first book written in the manner of the ‘oral tradition, and I hope it is only the beginning.’”<sup>35</sup> In his acknowledgments, he recognized “the contribution of his elders” and, notably, stated that he had been “careful not to profane any of the Ojibway teachings” and had “attempted to leave the sacred teachings intact where their complete form has

33 Hutchinson, *The Case of the Missing Auntie*, 88.

34 Hutchinson, *The Case of the Missing Auntie*, 91.

35 Edward Benton-Banai, quoted in “The Mishomis Book: The Voice of the Ojibway,” CBC Books, June 6, 2018, <https://www.cbc.ca/books/the-mishomis-book-the-voice-of-the-ojibway-1.4694260>.

been proclaimed by ritual.”<sup>36</sup> The book includes the Ojibway creation story and concludes with the chapter “Stepping into Modern History.” The narrator states,

I do not believe in isolating myself in the memories of the past.  
I do believe that with the teachings of yesterday we can better  
prepare ourselves for the uncertainties of tomorrow. I hope  
you will take these words that I seek to put down and use them  
in a good way. Use them to teach your children about the way  
life has developed for the Native people of this country.<sup>37</sup>

Among those books explicitly identifying the source of their stories as Knowledge Keepers is *Honouring the Buffalo: A Plains Cree Legend*, written by Judith Silverthorne as told by Ray Lavallee, published in 2015.<sup>38</sup> This book provides the story of the Buffalo, speaking with the Creator, offering to help the “two-leggeds” survive on the prairies and identifying how the various parts of its body could be used. The story is told by a grandfather to his young grandson, who wonders why the buffalo was honoured in ceremonies and advises, “I don’t know anything about them. . . . I have never seen a real one.”<sup>39</sup> The story is provided in both Cree (Y dialect) and English, and the book includes a teacher’s guide, photographs of some of the objects identified in the story, and notes relating to the pre- and post-newcomer bison populations and their current numbers.

More implicitly, *Treaty Words: For as Long as the Rivers Flow*, by Aimée Craft and published in 2021, is a lovely introduction to the meaning of the treaties as told to a young girl by her *Mishomis* (the Ojibway word for “grandfather”). “It dawned on her that Mishomis might not have many more seasons to live. He was sharing his teachings, parts of the bundle he carried, for her to bring forward and

36 Edward Benton-Banai, *The Mishomis Book: The Voice of the Ojibway* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), ii.

37 Benton-Banai, *The Mishomis Book*, 2.

38 Judith Silverthorne and Ray Lavallee, *Honouring the Buffalo: A Plains Cree Legend* (Regina: Your Nickel’s Worth Publishing, 2015). A website includes teacher guides for the book, links to the Calls to Action, and oral versions of the story in Cree. See Judith Silverthorne, “Honouring the Buffalo – Excerpt in English and Cree,” *Judith Silverthorne* (blog), accessed August 22, 2021, <https://judithsilverthorne.ca/home/all-ages-picture-book/honouring-the-buffalo-a-plains-cree-legend/honouring-the-buffalo-excerpt-in-english-and-cree/>.

39 Silverthorne and Lavallee, *Honouring the Buffalo*, 4.

to share with those who would come next.<sup>40</sup>

The real winner in the archives/archivist depiction sweepstakes, however, may be *Archives détective: enquête sur le mystère des archives*, a picture book by author Nancy Guilbert and illustrator Anna Griot, published by Éditions courtes et longues in France in 2021. The book is aimed at readers between the ages of 5 and 8 years old. In the reading room of an archives, space and time collide, and a child begins his quest, going from room to room, drawer to drawer, until, with the archivist's help, he finally finds the treasure he was looking for: his family's genealogical tree. The drawings are magical and entirely appropriate (see figure 1). There may be more books depicted than one would expect to find in an archives, but in Europe, many older holdings are bound. Still, the end result is exactly what archivists would want: the book is accurate, engaging, and in short, wonderful.



FIGURE 1 A page from *Archives détective: enquête sur le mystère des archives*, written by Nancy Guilbert and illustrated by Anna Griot, which shows young children some of the wonder and splendour of archival materials. Source: © Éditions courtes et longues, Paris, 2021.

40 Aimée Craft, *Treaty Words: For as Long as the Rivers Flow* (Toronto: Annick Press, 2021), 48.

And finally, *My First Look at Primary Sources*, by Rosie Banks, is in an entirely different category but still deserving of mention.<sup>41</sup> This is a textbook, aimed squarely at the educational market but still useful for archivists to consider, that introduces children aged 6 to 8 years to primary sources using very simple language and concepts. Interestingly, the publisher's website states, "The primary source is an indispensable concept as students hone research skills in the elementary classroom."<sup>42</sup> That seems very advanced! The phrase *primary sources* of course does not always mean just archival sources, so there are speeches, diaries, and letters, but also published autobiographies, newspapers, and so on. The book also suggests maps, clothes, tools, and buildings as well as emails and other online messages as useful primary sources. Although the book covers both published and archival material, the overall quality of this work is very high, and it will be useful for introducing young students to necessary concepts.

Once you get into young adult (YA) and teen fiction, written for readers of 12 or 13 years and older, the number of books with references to archives and archivists increases significantly. The books deserve reviews of their own, but to provide a taste of the depiction of archives and archivists in YA fiction, *Shadowshaper*, by Daniel José Older, is a good title.<sup>43</sup> Our hero, Sierra, is looking for information. She goes to the library and looks at a map until she finds the area called the Anthropology Archives. This is followed by some archival humour: "Subbasement Seven? . . . Great." The area is suitably peculiar: "Subbasement Seven looked more like a warehouse than a library. Metal shelves stretched into the darkness of a vast grey hall. Churning machinery hummed somewhere close by."<sup>44</sup> However, the archivist, Nydia, is quite jaunty: "She had a scarf wrapped

41 Rosie Banks, *My First Look at Primary Sources* (New York: Gareth Stevens Publishing, 2021). This is a burgeoning market. See also Kelly Boswell, *Research Primary Source Documents: Diaries, Letters, Journals, and More!* (North Mankato, MN: Pebble, 2019) and, by the same author and publisher in 2019, *Research Primary Source Audio: Speeches, Oral Histories, Music, and More!*; *Research Visual Primary Sources: Photographs, Paintings, Video, and More!*; and *Research Primary Source Artifacts: Tools, Clothing, Coins, and More!*; Susanna Keller, *What Are Primary Sources?* (New York: Britannica Educational Publishing, 2018); and Leia Tait, *Primary Sources* (New York: AV<sup>2</sup> by Weigl, 2020).

42 Gareth Stevens Publishing, "My First Look at Primary Sources: Looking at Literature," Gareth Stevens Publishing, accessed August 15, 2021, <https://www.garethstevens.com/title/My-First-Look-at-Primary-Sources>.

43 Daniel José Older, *Shadowshaper* (New York: Arthur A. Levine Books, 2015), Kindle.

44 Older, *Shadowshaper*, 45, Kindle.

round her neck and a knit cap pulled over her curly black hair.”<sup>45</sup> She runs the archives, but she is referred to as “the head librarian,” and she talks about opening her own library with “people’s stories.” Later in the book, however, she is referred to as the archivist, but this description is short-lived.<sup>46</sup> Nydia, who basically retrieves files for Sierra and arranges for a temporary copy card for her, turns out to be “an anthropologist superspy.”<sup>47</sup> Sigh. So, there is a taste of what an archives is, but the depiction and identification of the archivist is wanting. The book does provide the perspective of a racialized community, something that Older particularly emphasizes in his writing.<sup>48</sup>

There are many more titles in the YA and teen area. Archives and archivists have a certain cachet – a certain obscure romance and allure – that suits fantasy fiction very well. All these things appeal to tweens and teens: vampires, shape-shifters, demons, archivists, and so on. Archives conjure up history, mystery, and the unknown, so they are a good addition to a tale of fantasy.

If we turn to films and television, we might consider the 2014 movie *Paddington*, in which Paddington Bear and Mr. Brown go to find information about an explorer at the headquarters of the fictitious Geographers’ Guild in London.<sup>49</sup> What looks like it might be an exciting portrait of an archives turns out to be more a fanciful depiction of the catalogue and the archival material-delivery system, which uses a fantastic robotic system to retrieve material that is then shot through pneumatic tubes to the enquirer. The receptionist of the guild explains why the archival materials remain inviolate: “There are over two million letters, diaries, and artifacts up in our archive, meticulously filed, and they don’t stay that way by letting strange men and their bears rummage around.” Upstaged by a robotic delivery system! That is progress of sorts, although the item-level descriptions are more suggestive of those in a library than an archives.<sup>50</sup> Unfortunately, Paddington and Mr. Brown never encounter

45 Older, *Shadowshaper*, 45, Kindle.

46 Older, *Shadowshaper*, 115, Kindle.

47 Older, *Shadowshaper*, 175, Kindle.

48 “Daniel José Older,” Wikipedia, last modified September 13, 2021, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daniel\\_Jos%C3%A9\\_Older](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daniel_Jos%C3%A9_Older).

49 *Paddington*, directed by Paul King ([Borehamwood, UK]: Heyday Films Ltd., 2014).

50 It is interesting, from an archival viewpoint, to make a careful analysis of the items pulled up on the computer screen when Mr. Brown types into the database “darkest Peru,” the location of the expedition that discovered

an archivist, just a slightly sleazy security guard; this produces one of the funniest scenes in the entire movie but does not really reveal anything about archival staff. Using the database accessed through a clunky, older computer and the pneumatic delivery system, our heroes manage to sneak out a film canister, which they take home and find that it identifies the explorer they were looking for.

On television, in 1985, there was a Canadian version of the Japanese animated series *Astro Boy*.<sup>51</sup> Because four or five minutes were cut from each Japanese episode, to remove the really violent parts for gentler Canadian viewing, *Astro Boy* would report back to a computer named Geronimo, which would start by saying, "Good day. I am ready to record your report for the archives of the Institute."<sup>52</sup> After *Astro Boy* made his report, a female narrator would challenge viewers to pick out the error that *Astro Boy* had deliberately made and compare their answers to those of their friends. This may be the quintessential Canadian adaptation.

A surprisingly nuanced portrait of the research process is provided by none other than *The Simpsons*, that eerily prescient and satirical television show about a family and their friends and fellow citizens in the community of Springfield. Although the show is aimed at adults, it has a dedicated following among children. The episode in question is about exploring family trees, and Lisa, the middle child, is instructed by her teacher to compose one for her own family.<sup>53</sup> We see Lisa with photos and like materials at the kitchen table; she is disturbed to find out that her family is composed of horrible people. Afterwards, she talks to her grandfather to get more family information, then searches the attic for family records and discovers a (dusty!) diary, which disintegrates at the crucial point in the story of Lisa's forebear, Eliza Simpson, who was trying to smuggle an enslaved person north. Disappointingly for us, her mother suggests they go

Paddington's aunt and uncle. In addition to the museum specimens "Bone Sample of Peruvian Paso Horse Remains" and "Round Toed Lowland Paca Stool Sample," there is "Map of Andean Condor Flight Patterns," "Photographs Lima – Cusco," "Hat Purchase Order (Moody & Farrell)," and "Receipt (Piano Hire)" – the significant and the mundane, which is typical for early archival fonds.

51 "Astro Boy (1980 TV series)," Wikipedia, last modified September 4, 2021, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Astro\\_Boy\\_\(1980\\_TV\\_series\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Astro_Boy_(1980_TV_series)). The show originated as a manga in 1952.

52 AstroBoy Online, "The Geronimo Reports," accessed August 31, 2021, [https://www.astroboy-online.com/wiki/episodes/astro\\_s\\_reports\\_to\\_geronimo](https://www.astroboy-online.com/wiki/episodes/astro_s_reports_to_geronimo).

53 "The Simpsons, The Secret of the Ancestors of the Simpsons That No One Knew," YouTube video, 9:09, posted by "Legend Simpsons," May 17, 2021, [https://youtu.be/YF3WIQ\\_jVkk](https://youtu.be/YF3WIQ_jVkk).



to the Springfield Library for answers. There, we get more of Eliza's story from anecdotes in a cookbook produced by Eliza's mother, which seems to indicate that Lisa's forebears saved this person. When Lisa makes a report to the school, another student produces an original diary that contradicts the happy tale. Lisa is crushed. But then, she suddenly appears somewhere where there are dozens of tapes on a shelf in the background. When she holds up one of the tapes, it says, "Springfield Historical Society Oral History Project 1952." Can we say definitively that this is an archives? Perhaps not, but it is likely.<sup>54</sup> Lisa gets more of the story, but finally, it is her grandfather who gives her the news that one of her forebears was actually the enslaved person in the story. So, although the archives does not feature hugely in this tale, it makes a prominent appearance, and if one were to do a family genealogy, these are likely all steps that one would take: looking at family records, speaking with relatives, searching for further family documents, checking for published materials in the library, and finally, looking for materials in an archives.

This is not an exhaustive list of every piece of children's literature (or film or television show) that in some way depicts archival records, archival institutions, or archivists. It provides a taste of some of the materials that are currently available to children. We are sure that there are more materials, but it is highly unlikely to be a whole lot more, given how difficult it was to track down even these titles. We may conclude that the offerings overall are pitiable, and that archival institutions and archivists are not featured very often in children's literature. And while one may think that this is to be expected, one might consider, in sharp contrast, the many titles that provide descriptions of libraries, librarians, art galleries, and museums and their curators.<sup>55</sup>

Richard Cox noted that, when books provide few accurate historic details, where the depictions of archives and archivists are wrong or missing, "such

54 Note that, in the United States, historical societies were some of the earliest organizations to collect private archives, and they continue in that role today. See, for example, the Oregon Historical Society (Springfield is located in Oregon) and the Minnesota Historical Society. See Claudia De La Roca "Matt Groening Reveals the Location of the Real Springfield," *Smithsonian Magazine*, May 2012, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/matt-groening-reveals-the-location-of-the-real-springfield-60583379/>.

55 See, for example, Rachel Rosenberg, "Nine of the Best Children's Books about Libraries and Librarians," Book Riot, September 21, 2020, <https://bookriot.com/childrens-books-about-libraries-and-librarians/>; Alison, "10 Awesome Kids [sic] Books about Museums," Museum Travelers, accessed September 8, 2021, <http://museumtravelers.com/2019/12/02/10-awesome-kids-books-about-museums/>; and Pragmatic Mom, "Children's Books about Art Mysteries: Best Mysteries for Kids Set in Museums," *Pragmatic Mom* (blog), accessed September 8, 2021, <https://www.pragmaticmom.com/2020/04/childrens-books-about-art-mysteries/>. These are lists of the best books on these topics; there are many, many more titles.

volumes are the results of authors combing published records rather than through any effort to visit and examine the original records or to consult with the archivist, perhaps explaining the absence of importance of the archival program and records professionals.”<sup>56</sup> That authors try to portray archives and archivists when they do not have experience with either or do not fully comprehend their experience probably explains why several of the books have such incomplete – or even completely wrong! – depictions.

The authors’ motivation for writing material that depicts archives and archivists in most cases cannot be known but in some cases is available to us. Christopher Nokes noted that the reason why he made Cee Bear the company archivist and keeper of records was because his wife had read a novel titled *The Bear*, “(oddly) about an archivist and a bear. It just stuck with me.”<sup>57</sup> And no doubt Christopher was sensitized to archives and archivists because of his wife’s profession. Michael Dahl has a whole series of young adult titles about libraries, of which *Blood in the Library* is one.<sup>58</sup> He has stated that, when he was a child, he hung out at the library a lot, and he thought it would be fun to make the hero a librarian.<sup>59</sup> He obviously has an idea that archivists are somehow connected to libraries but does not know precisely how. The titles of some other books Rosie Banks has written – *My First Look at Fairy Tales*, *My First Look at Poetry*, *My First Look at Folktales*, *My First Look at Myths*, *My First Look at Fables* – indicate that she is looking at different types of writing. These titles may well be requested by the publisher.

For *Archives détective*, Nancy Guilbert helpfully explains in a YouTube video why and how she came to write such an accurate book.<sup>60</sup> The real reason she pursued the theme of searching for a family tree in an archives was that she was approached by archivists in the Haute-Savoie region of France to write a book

56 Richard Cox, *Managing Records as Evidence and Information* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000), 147.

57 Christopher Nokes, email to author, September 2021. Likely this refers to Marian Engel’s novel *Bear* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976).

58 See for example, *The Book that Ate My Brother* (2010) and *Dictionary of 1,000 Rooms* (2011). FantasticFiction, “Return to the Library of Doom: A Series by Michael Dahl,” accessed September 4, 2021, <https://www.fantasticfiction.com/d/michael-dahl/return-to-the-library-of-doom/>.

59 “Michael Dahl (author) Interview,” YouTube video, 10:05, posted by “Capstone Publishers,” January 28, 2009, <https://youtu.be/P724bN4AEIA>.

60 “Nancy Guilbert présente Archives détective,” YouTube video, 2:05, posted by “Éditions courtes et longues,” January 26, 2021, <https://youtu.be/kf1Ziq5J9Ug>.

that would familiarize young readers with the archives.<sup>61</sup> As the archivists note on their own website, they have a habit of producing specialized publications that expose their “treasures,”<sup>62</sup> and this year, they set themselves the goal of making the “l’univers mystérieux des archives” accessible to the youngest children. The author and illustrator met the team from the archives by videoconference and then went to Annecy to refine their work. Guilbert noted that she had never been in an archives before: “Pour ma part, je n’avais jamais mis les pieds dans des archives alors ce fut une immersion en terrain inconnu.”<sup>63</sup> Unfortunately, what follows is an unpleasant eye-opener: she states that she had an impression of entering an anthill where everything was in disarray. Although she qualifies that by saying that things were in fact well-organized and in their places, it is a bit of a shock to see how we are perceived by outsiders. As a thorough exploration of archives and archivists, however, *Archives détective* proves that an author does not need to have first-hand experience if archivists are willing to put in the time to provide guidance.<sup>64</sup>

Crista Bradley, as both author and archivist, of course ensures that her depictions of archives, archival materials, and archivists are 100 percent accurate. This is perhaps the best of all worlds, but creating such a resource is an incredibly labour-intensive process.

Telling our story, and ensuring our role and mandate are understood correctly, is essential. Happily, ours is an easy story to convey: full of emotion, relatable, and as exciting as a good detective novel. This is ground Hugh Taylor trod in 1972, when he suggested,

61 “Il est né d’un désir de la part des archives de Haute-Savoie pour que les plus petits lecteurs puissent se familiariser avec cet univers.” “Nancy Guilbert présente,” 00:00:12.

62 Haute-Savoie Actualités, “Littérature Jeunesse – Quand Les Archives s’en Mêlent,” Haute-Savoie Actualités, accessed September 2, 2021, <https://actu.hautesavoie.fr/explorez-actu/litterature-jeunesse-quand-les-archives-sen-melent>.

63 “Nancy Guilbert présente,” 00:00:38.

64 Interestingly, the Departmental Archives of Gard in France recently asked local community software developers to create a free video game for smart phones, called “Mémoire d’Arumac,” that gives a taste of archives to the youngest children. Again, the developers visited the archives personally and designed a game that provides children with an opportunity to collect and preserve historic documents. See Archives du Gard, “Jeu vidéo éducatif: Mémoire d’Arumac,” accessed September 27, 2021, <https://archives.gard.fr/participer/jouer/a-la-decouverte-des-archives/jeu-video-educatif-memoire-darumac.html>.

As archivists, we should give a great deal more thought to the implications of manuscripts as communication, as evidence of human transaction as it once was. We should try to devise ways of conveying the intense pleasure which can be experienced when handling manuscript and record groups, pleasure which has something to do with personal discovery.<sup>65</sup>

That discovery is not one of “history” per se, but of discovering the fundamental importance of records. It is about helping children “[play] at being archivists” through a variety of narrative devices, thereby building familiarity with what archives are, what archivists do, and why it matters.<sup>66</sup>

Finally, Richard Cox stated, “If we do not capture the interests of young people, do we really have any chance of a future?”<sup>67</sup> If we archivists want people to talk about us and what we know, we need to be open, creative, and varied in our telling or get others to tell our story. Starting with children is a good approach. So, get cracking!

<sup>65</sup> Hugh Taylor, “Clio in the Raw: Archival Materials and the Teaching of History,” *American Archivist* 35, no. 3–4 (1972): 329.

<sup>66</sup> Taylor, “Clio in the Raw,” 330.

<sup>67</sup> Cox, “A Sense of the Future,” 192.

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