



"The movement toward online learning provides school librarians with new ways to collaborate in order to infuse information literacy within the K-12 curriculum."

# Transforming Collaboration

## Student Learning—Anytime, Anywhere

STEPHANIE A. JONES AND LUCY SANTOS GREEN

*Peer reviewed. Accepted for publication, December 2012*

### ABSTRACT

Collaborative partnerships have long been the brass ring of school librarianship. In many instances, face-to-face collaboration is linked to the physical schedule of the librarian or classroom teacher rather than the curricular needs of students. Using free and open-source Web 2.0 technologies to develop online learning, school librarians can harness the power of virtual collaboration to impact student learning anytime, anywhere. Although librarians value collaboration, the virtual option has not been widely considered or understood. In today's school library program, is virtual collaboration a valid approach? The authors propose that school librarians participate in virtual collaboration with teachers through the design, development, and employment of online learning units.

Collaboration between school librarians and classroom teachers to integrate information-literacy skills instruction into the curriculum has long been a goal of the school library profession. In practice, establishing such collaborative partnerships has been difficult to achieve for a variety of reasons, including scheduling, lack of support staff, and an emphasis on standardized testing (Canter, Voytecki, Zambone, & Jones, 2011). In many instances, face-to-face collaboration is linked to the physical schedule of the librarian or classroom teacher rather than the curricular needs of students. Eisenberg and Murray (2011) contend that our profession needs to move the sacred cow of collaboration aside and focus instead on "connecting" to assignments and curriculum, "making sure that the information literacy program reaches every student" (p. 10). An innovative approach to promoting such learning connections is through online learning, another way the teacher librarian can reach into the classroom.

### THE GROWTH OF K-12 ONLINE LEARNING

The International Association for K-12 Online Learning, iNACOL, defines online learning as "education in which instruction and content are delivered primarily over the Internet [and] does not include printed-based correspondence education, broadcast television or radio, videocassettes, and stand-alone educational software programs that do not have a significant Internet-based instructional component" (International Association for Online Learning, 2011b). Online learning is becoming a common feature in public schools across the globe, especially at the secondary level. It is projected that by 2014, 10% of all courses will be computer based, and by 2019, 50% of these courses will be offered online (Inter-

national Association for Online Learning, 2011a). Even now, educational technology consultants estimate that over two million American high school students are currently enrolled in online courses (Nagel, 2009).

Today, five states specify a certain number of hours in online learning as part of graduation requirements. Recently, Idaho added a stipulation for the completion of two online courses before high school graduation, although voters turned down the funding mechanism for this initiative in November 2012. Other states are also considering adding these types of online experiences (Kennedy & Archambault, 2012). For example, in Georgia, where we are located, online learning is not required but is strongly encouraged. Additionally, the current economic climate has spurred school districts to use online learning to meet qualified teaching standards for hard-to-fill positions in such areas as science and foreign language.

### VIRTUAL COLLABORATION THROUGH ONLINE LEARNING

The movement toward online learning provides school librarians with new ways to collaborate in order to infuse information literacy within the K-12 curriculum. We envision this type of collaboration occurring through the design, development, and deployment of online learning

units (OLUs). OLU, as defined by California State University's Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching, are short (four to six week) learning opportunities that often support face-to-face instruction (CELT, 2012). These units incorporate multiple lessons that extend learning through technology-rich experiences not available in face-to-face interactions. Consequently, OLU do not create *more* work—they simply give students the capacity to demonstrate content mastery through a broader range of media formats (CELT, 2012). Online learning units can be designed to include stand-alone activities, as well as blended learning approaches such as quick tutorial videos (popularized by efforts such as Kahn Academy). Virtual collaboration through OLU can also help teacher librarians support classroom teachers and students who are engaged in a flipped classroom model.

Collaboration through online learning—or virtual collaboration, as we prefer to call it—addresses many of the difficulties inherent in traditional face-to-face collaborative efforts. One of the most crucial advantages of online learning to a school library program is that it allows the librarian to deliver critical instruction despite lack of face-to-face time during the school day. Learning units delivered online can be tied to the curriculum needs of students and teachers instead of being limited by the physical library or classroom schedule. Once developed, these units can be tapped at the point of need. Even if the librarian is not available, students still access the instruction. There are several other important advantages to virtual collaboration. Instructionally speaking, OLU incorporate different modalities with ease. A dizzying array of multimedia tools featuring video and audio quickly present content in a myriad of ways.

These online units are repeatable and are not constrained either by the library's physical space or the presence or absence of staff. Those of us who have worked in smaller libraries can testify to the frustration of cutting back on classes for lack of facility space and support staff. Online, students work at their own pace, reviewing

materials as many times as necessary. This is especially beneficial to English-language learners and students with special needs, who may require more time to interact with academic material. Online discussions give this student population, in particular, an equitable voice—they are able to take time crafting a response to others in the class. Other disenfranchised groups benefit from online units delivered by the school librarian since many socioeconomically disadvantaged students might not have access to online learning experiences outside of the school system. Thus, the teacher librarian might not be present at the actual time of instruction but, in a collaborative technology, could be present alongside the teacher at other times during the school day or the evening.

Another advantage to developing a library OLU on any topic is that the unit itself becomes a record and advocacy tool to promote the library's role in student learning. In addition, it is an opportunity for the school librarian to model excellence in the integration of technology in instruction. There may be some concern that virtual collaboration would eliminate the need for student presence in the physical library. Our response is that virtual collaboration needs to be part of a successful library program and not its main thrust. OLU can be delivered in blended modes, containing face-to-face activities that extend the learning experience and invite students and teachers to continue a relationship with the library space. In fact, OLU may serve as a gateway to promote physical resources and services available in the library. Perfect candidates for such online experiences might be those instructions the teacher librarian seems to have to repeat over and over again in the physical space.

The design of OLU is a natural progression for school librarians, many of whom have experience in creating media center websites with information portals, webliographies, pathfinders, and webquests. In the past, to deliver online learning, librarians needed access to expensive or complicated course management systems, such as Blackboard or Moodle.

## BOOKMARKIT

JOE SUTLIFF SANDERS



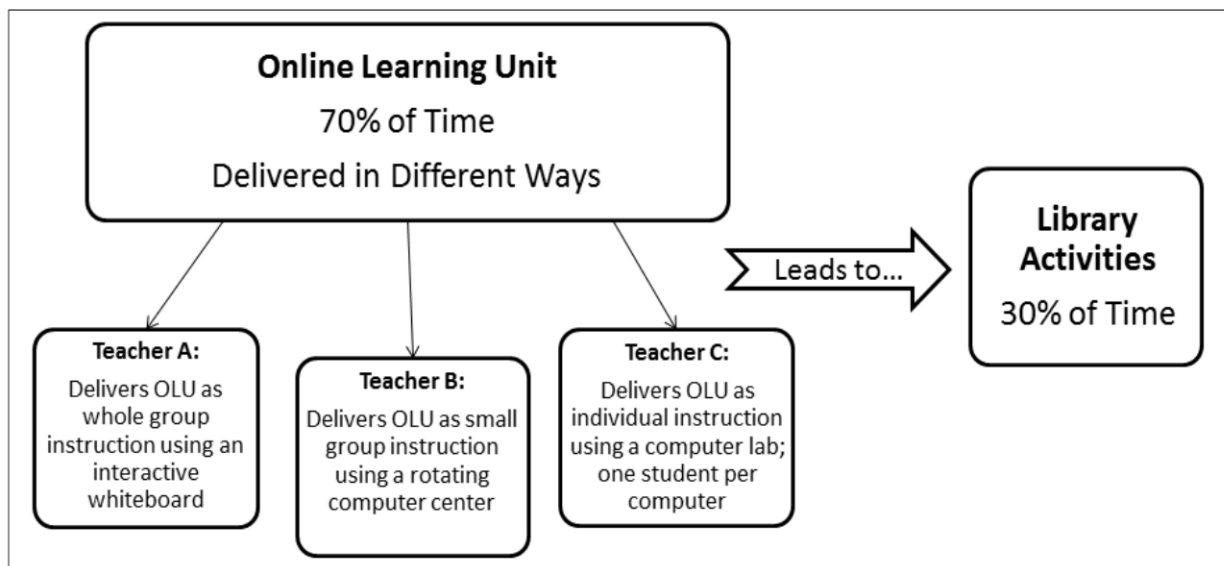
### GRAPHIC NOVELS

#### COMICS OF HISTORY AND THOUGHT

**Taxes, the Tea Party, and Those Revolting Rebels.** Stan Mack. NBM, 2011. \$14.99. 978-1-56163-697-6. Grades 5 and up. Mack's history of the American Revolution strikes just the right balance. It's packed with names, dates, places, and ideas, but they only come up when they're needed, as though Mack is giving an enthusiastic, on-the-fly lecture, rather than laying out information to be memorized. The book includes maps and sidebars, but also features jokes, often hidden as little gifts within a larger image. The result is a history of the nation's birth that gets exactly the treatment it needs: irreverent admiration for the pluck of visionaries and rueful honesty about the founding ideas that still shape our reality.

**Philosophy: A Discovery in Comics.** Margreet de Heer. NBM, 2012. \$16.99. 978-1-56163-698-3. Grades 7 and up. In short, colorful, humorously self-reflective chapters, de Heer takes us on a first-person tour of the biggest questions and the most famous names of philosophy, ending with the personal philosophies of some surprisingly interesting people rarely thought of as philosophers. The characters and arguments of philosophy come brilliantly to life through a series of quirky, memorable conversations.

**Harvey Pekar's Cleveland.** Harvey Pekar and Joseph Remnant. Top Shelf, 2012. \$21.99. 978-1-60309-091-9. Grades 9 and up. The prototypical biographer of American comics, Pekar died shortly before the publication of **Cleveland**, the book named after the city where he spent his life and dreams. If this is the last book we have from him, it's a fitting finishing point for his influential career. The book moves effortlessly between his personal history in the city and the city's fortunes—most of which have been poor. The illustration style flirts with the style of Robert Crumb, one of Pekar's earliest collaborators, but has enough confidence in Remnant's eye for detail and perspective that it is always unique, as are the city and author nested in this gem of a book.



**Figure 1.** The Split-Time Unit Graph

However, with the explosion and broad variety of free and open-source Web 2.0 technologies, school librarians can now easily develop and deliver secure OLUs addressing information literacy skills. These units, available anytime, anywhere, are then integrated into the curriculum whenever needed, independent of facility and staff scheduling constraints, no html skills required!

## APPROACHES TO VIRTUAL COLLABORATION

### The Split-Time Unit

In this approach, the school librarian and teacher jointly select a topic that typically requires multiple days of inquiry. The school librarian designs an OLU to prepare students for shortened, more efficient library sessions, splitting the inquiry time between online/class time and library time. This approach might be used when:

- Introducing students to available search tools and online resources
- Helping students select a topic or analyze preselected resources
- Guiding students through the steps of designing an inquiry plan

### The Split-Time Unit Scenario

Fourth-grade teachers at Pine Bluff Elementary explore ways to address Common Core reading standards for informational text. According to these standards, students are expected to *compare and contrast a firsthand and secondhand account of the same event or topic and describe the differences in focus and the information provided*. Mrs. McCallar, the school librarian, suggests an OLU to be completed in class before coming to the library. She explains that the unit would cover much of the material typically addressed during the first stages of an inquiry project. Using Edmodo, Mrs. McCallar creates four short lessons for this OLU. When it is ready, teachers deploy the unit using different instructional approaches. For an example of this type of unit, see <http://viewpure.com/aojE9T8iFtg>.

### The Skills-Based Unit

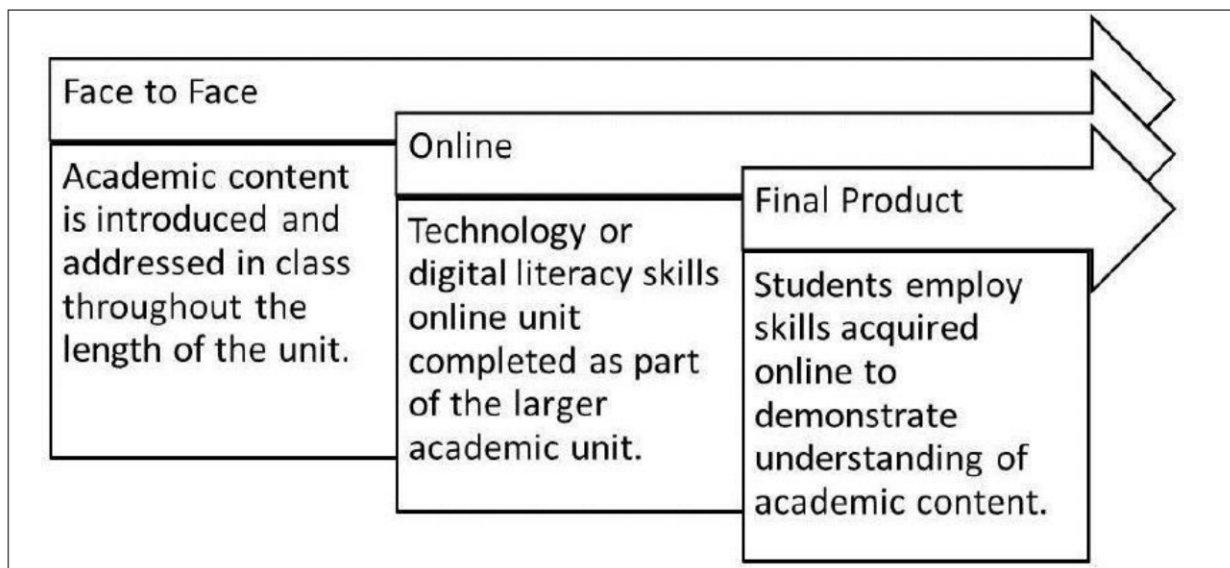
In this approach, the school librarian designs an OLU to train students on the use of a technology tool or in order to develop a digital literacy skill. Skills introduced during this unit are foundational and necessary in order for students to create a product or engage in a specific online behavior. This approach might be used when:

- Face-to-face time is dedicated to the academic content
- Students create larger, more complex technology products (e.g., a podcast or video)
- Digital citizenship issues, such as cyber safety, need to be addressed

### The Skills-Based Unit Scenario

Mr. Howard, a 7th grade language arts teacher, wants to encourage meaningful student reflection of a class novel. He discusses the possibility of blogging with the school librarian, Mr. Mclean. Together, they identify the prerequisite skills students need in order to successfully complete a blogging project. Mr. Howard prefers to use whole group class time for discussion and reading. As a result, Mr. Mclean designs an OLU students can work through independently. The unit introduces students to the structure of blogs, the concept of a world-wide audience, and general netiquette policies. Mr. Mclean uses Mr. Howard's class blog to host the OLU in order to further model appropriate blogging behavior. For an example of this type of unit, access the following link: <http://viewpure.com/rFVSMqCtpd0>





**Figure 2.** The Skills-Based Unit Graph

### *The Independent Unit*

In this approach, the school librarian designs and delivers a fully online, stand-alone short course. This type of unit can be developed to address information-literacy skills typically taught in the media center. It may also be developed in collaboration with a grade level or department to teach a topic that needs to be consistently addressed across multiple classrooms. This

unit differs from the skills-based approach because it is completed independent of any classroom work or schedule. It might be used for:

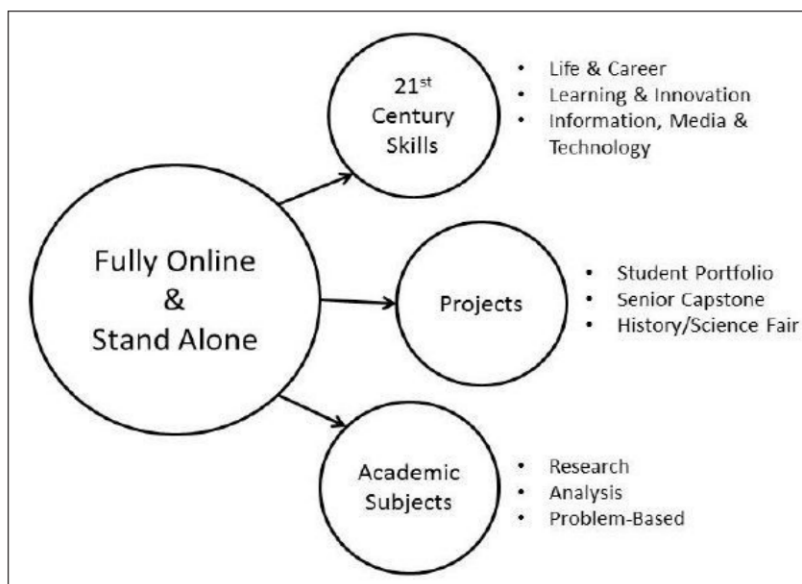
- Training students on specific twenty-first century skills
- Guiding students through a large project (e.g., portfolio, college and career development)
- Exploring an academic topic in depth

### *The Independent Unit Scenario*

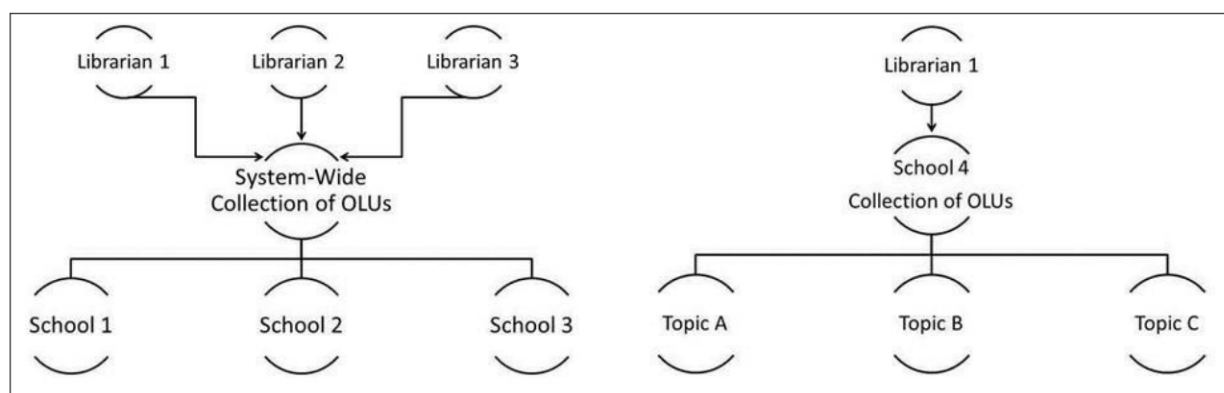
Mrs. Henderson, a high school librarian, works closely with the academic departments to help students complete both short- and long-term research projects. Since it is notoriously difficult to schedule all classes for face-to-face information-literacy skill lessons, she has developed a virtual library hub. This hub contains stand-alone OLUs covering such topics as *researching with educational databases* and *citation of sources*. Students can access and complete these courses anytime, anywhere. Developed in Google Site, this unit contains tabs and tutorials that support the use of these resources in different content areas. Teachers are also able to submit requests for other short courses they would like Mrs. Henderson to develop. For an example of this type of unit, see <http://viewpure.com/JtLoabhH068>.

### *The Professional Development Unit*

The professional development unit, as the name implies, is designed by a school librarian for the express purpose of delivering training to other teachers or education professionals. These types of OLUs can be developed by one librarian for his or her campus or can be designed by several li-



**Figure 3.** The Independent Unit Graph



**Figure 4.** The Professional Development Unit Graph

brarians across one school system and collected into a repository made available to all system employees. This type of unit would be appropriate for training on:

- Inquiry learning and Common Core standards
- Technology tools and resources
- Digital citizenship and policy
- Multiple literacies

An example of such a repository is IN-FOhio, which provides free short courses with either credit or certificates of participation.

### *The Professional Development Unit Scenario*

Hancock County Schools recently received a large technology grant to expand its wireless network. The possibilities generated by this grant highlighted the need for teacher training on technology integration. At the beginning of the school year, Hancock County's school librarians met to discuss their role in designing and delivering professional development. Together they brainstormed technology integration skills and topics. After an extensive list was created, the librarians decided to work together to develop a collection of OLUs accessible by all Hancock County faculty and staff. Each of the librarians selected topics they were most comfortable teaching. Ms. Turner, one of the librarians, volunteered to develop an OLU on Web 2.0 tools and information literacy. For an example of this type of unit, see <http://viewpure.com/9KoLcvWhHC8>.

### *Student-Produced Tutorials*

One part of the collaborative process that we should not overlook is the possibility of student-produced tutorials. Professional development units created by school librarians can include short tutorials for teachers and student peers. For example, students may be struggling to access certain useful apps or tools on the iPad or various Android devices. A group of students create a one- or two-minute video tutorial demonstrating how to perform a wide variety of fixes. These videos are then accessible across the school community and updated quickly as technology changes. The closer a school moves toward Bring Your Own Device, the more important such quickie tutorials and demonstrations become.

### **EXPANDING THE INFLUENCE OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY SCHOOL LIBRARY**

The scenarios discussed above represent just a fraction of the potential we envision for virtual collaboration. The flexibility that is inherent in online learning enables many approaches to integration of OLUs in a K-12 library program. More than at any other time in our profession's history, school librarians are increasingly comfortable with a broad range of technological tools. Therefore, the foundation for school librarians as online course designers and instructors is solid. The twenty-first cen-

tury school library is poised to expand its influence beyond the physical brick-and-mortar space into a virtual learning environment where information literacy is an ever-present component. We are by no means suggesting that school librarians use an online platform to replace face-to-face collaborative efforts. Instead, we encourage you, the school librarian, to view designing and delivering OLUs as an opportunity to expand your sphere of influence and impact. When faced with barriers of limited time and resources, consider the technological and pedagogical expertise you possess. Use online learning to expand the collaborative approach in your school community by virtually enhancing student learning anytime, anywhere.

### **RESOURCES TO EXPLORE**

School librarians who are interested in virtual collaboration and would like to know more have many resources at their disposal. Free and open-source online tools available include (but are not limited to):

- Diigo
- Edmodo
- Google Sites
- Jing
- Learnist
- MentorMob
- PBWorks
- Pearltrees
- Screencast-o-matic
- Screenshare
- Scribd
- Thinglink

- Twiddla
- Voicethread
- Voki

One of the most prominent and highly regarded organizations at the forefront of the K–12 online learning movement, iNACOL, has multiple resources for those interested in designing online courses. Its website, [www.inacol.org](http://www.inacol.org), contains numerous links, brochures, frameworks, advocacy materials, and guides for both members and nonmembers. We also recommend *Teaching Online: A Practical Guide* by Susan Ko and Steve Rossen (ISBN: 978-0415997263) and *Designing Online Learning: A Primer for Librarians* edited by Sue W. Alman, Christinger Tomer, and Margaret L. Lincoln (ISBN: 978-1598846379).

## REFERENCES

Canter, L., Voytecki, K., Zambone, A., & Jones, J. (2011). School librarians: The forgotten partners. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 43(3), 14–20.

CEL.T. (2012). Center for excellence in learning and teaching. Retrieved from <http://www.csuchico.edu/celt/roi>.

Eisenberg, M. B., & Murray, J. (2011). Big 6 by the month: A new approach. *Library Media Connection*, 29(6), 10–13.

International Association for Online Learning. (2011a, April). Fast facts about online learning. Retrieved from [http://www.inacol.org/press/docs/NACOL\\_fastfacts-hr-web-April2011.pdf](http://www.inacol.org/press/docs/NACOL_fastfacts-hr-web-April2011.pdf).

International Association for Online Learning. (2011b, October). The online learning definitions project. Retrieved from [http://www.inacol.org/research/docs/iNACOL\\_DefinitionsProject.pdf](http://www.inacol.org/research/docs/iNACOL_DefinitionsProject.pdf).

Kennedy, K., & Archambault, L. (2012). Offering preservice teachers field experiences in K–12 online learning: A national survey of teacher education programs. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 63(3), 185–200.

Nagel, D. (2009, October). 10.5 million preK–12 students will attend classes online by 2014. *THE Journal*. Retrieved from <http://thejournal.com/articles/2009/10/28/10.5-million-prek-12-students-will-attend-classes-online-by-2014.aspx>.

Dr. Stephanie A. Jones is an assistant professor in the online instructional technology program at Georgia Southern University, where she teaches future school librarians. She received a Ph.D. in instructional technology from the University of Georgia and a master of librarianship from Emory University. Dr. Jones is a coeditor of the *Educational Media and Technology Yearbook*. Her current research interests include the career development of school librarians, online teaching and learning, and storytelling pedagogy.

Dr. Lucy Santos Green has been a classroom teacher and school librarian in both large, urban school systems and rural areas. Dr. Green is an assistant professor of instructional technology at Georgia Southern University, where she teaches graduate courses in school library media, web design, and online pedagogy. She received an EdD in instructional technology from Texas Tech University and a master of library science from Texas Woman's University. Her research focuses on school librarianship in the twenty-first century and virtual school librarianship.

# BOOKMARKIT

JOE SUTLIFF SANDERS



## GRAPHIC NOVELS

### HORROR WITH A HEART

**Fairy Tales of Oscar Wilde: The Happy Prince.** P. Craig Russell. NBM, 2012. \$16.99. 978-1-56163-626-6. Grades 3 and up. It might seem odd to think of Wilde's classic tale of the statue that loved his city—and the swallow that loved the statue—as a tale of horror. But there's something profoundly horrific in the way the statue gives the precious and finite parts of his body to save the city he loves. Russell's illustrations slip delicately between the terrific pain the prince sees and the fragile joy the bird helps him deliver.

**Friends with Boys.** Faith Erin Hicks. First Second, 2012. \$15.99. 978-1-59643-556-8. Grades 5 and up. Maggie is a girl in the middle. She's on the cusp of a new life in high school, without the mother who suddenly left, alongside a father with sudden responsibility, and between the cool kids and the punks at her new school. And then there's the ghost, whose longing for her lost family mirrors Maggie's craving for a world where she can belong. Hicks' story swings powerfully from sadness to self-fulfillment and back again.

**Moriarty, Vol. 2: The Lazarus Tree.** Daniel Corey, Anthony Diecidue, and Mike Vosburg. Image, 2012. \$14.99. 978-1-60706-490-9. Grades 9 and up. It's here in the second volume of the series, which features as its anti-hero the legendary villain from the classic Sherlock Holmes adventures, that the story begins to achieve its potential. Moriarty has long since rid himself of Holmes and put in place a global network of agents that ensures his success, but a vision of his own death haunts him. As he bends his extraordinary mind toward preventing the nightmare from coming true, he begins to suspect that Holmes is not defeated after all, that he has been watching from the wings all along.