

**Reviving Reading: School
Library Programming,
Author Visits and Books
that Rock!**

Alison M. G. Follo

LIBRARIES UNLIMITED

REVIVING READING

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Author Visits and Books that Rock!***

Alison M. G. Follos

Foreword by Jack Gantos



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Dedicated to my mother, Stevie Capozio, who taught me to nourish the dream,
and my father, M. R. Dubin (April 16, 1916–January 14, 1997), who told me,
“Always keep your sense of humor.”

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FOREWORD

After reading the introduction to Alison Follos's essential book on literacy and literature, you may feel—as a reader—that you are on the endangered species list. Perhaps you will imagine yourself as a carnival act in which a curtain is pulled aside by a cigar-smoking barker who has gathered a crowd to watch as you sit upon a stage in an easy chair, actually reading a book.

“Look, the *creature* is reading a book!” the barker exclaims.

The audience gasps. How arcane, they think. How primitive.

I know there are times when readers feel alienated from society and so disconnected from the non-reading majority that they feel the need to check into a mental hospital. This impulse seems reasonable, given that the staff will probably give them a nice room with a view, a comfortable chair, and a reading lamp. The risk is that they may never give up the reading habit and the staff will not release them.

But there is hope for those suffering from the affliction of reading: Instead of a hospital, one can just check into a library and check out with a fresh book. And in each book there may be something to read about that is so engrossing that time vanishes as the imagination replaces consciousness. Ahhh, what could be better than that? To sit in your own home—on the stage of your own life—and think to yourself, “Yes, this creature chooses to read.”

Like you, I am one of these reading creatures. And as a result of so much reading, I decided to write books, too. I decided to do this when I was young, and I went to college for writing. I published my first book for children (*Rotten Ralph*) in 1976 and, shortly after, the publisher asked me to visit a school or two and read to kids. That sounded grand. But the reality was less so. I was a bit green at commanding the attention of young students, and the schools were uneven with regard to preparing for me, and how to follow up after I was gone.

Fortunately I've grown up some and refined my creative writing and literature visits, and the schools have become far savvier at preparation and integrating the literature and creative writing into the curriculum. So for me—and for Alison Follos—there is great hope with regard to reading and all of the many benefits a life of the mind offers. Plus, at no time have more and better books for children been published. Also, the numbers of fine authors who are willing to visit schools are many. And we find that in the colleges that offer degrees in teaching that children's literature is stressed as an essential component of a solid education.

And, libraries are often the hub of the school life. In other words, the building blocks are in place for great success with literacy.

However, success will not happen without smarts and effort. Alison Follos animates these building blocks through her clear and practical approaches to elevating a school's zest for literature. Like any good book chock full of teaching tips, take ownership of it. Use what you can. Put it to work. Add what you will to your toolbox of teaching. We will always be a field of dedicated teachers. We will always have impressionable young minds to mentor, and we will be an unrelenting force for the pleasure of the imagination and the power of books to elevate our minds. We believe this so much we want to share it with others—and this book shares the experience of a master teacher and librarian. She is one of us.

Jack Gantos

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