

Promoting literacy, one children's book and author at a time.



## May at An Open Book Foundation

Over the course of our past few newsletters, you met a handful of AOB's award winning authors, learned how a book-based event is planned and accomplished, and read a bit about what happens *after* an author or illustrator's visit. This month, we will turn from what we do to who we are. Many people are surprised to learn that the dozens of book club meetings and hundreds of author presentations each school year are executed by a tiny team of staff and volunteers. This small organization casts a huge shadow thanks in large part to constant collaborative communication, blurring the boundaries of our official job titles. Read on to learn more about **The People of AOB!**

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### Dara La Porte

Founder and Executive Director Dara La Porte oversees all operations of An Open Book from book deliveries to Board meetings. Building on the relationships Dara forged in her many years as a children's book seller, Dara is typically the first point-of-contact that schools, authors, publishers, or community groups will have with AOB. On any given day you might find Dara at an author event, representing AOB at guild or community meetings, or in the office hatching ideas about how to do what we do even better than before. Of the group, Dara has the shortest commute to work--down a hallway--since she and her husband, Todd, host AOB's office in their home. (Above, Dara with young readers at an event with Andrea Beaty.)



For additional information on how Dara and **Heidi Powell** harnessed their shared talents and mutual interests to create An Open Book Foundation, please visit "How We Began" [on our website](#). Dara and Heidi still confer regularly, for which AOB is all the better.

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## Janet Zwick



In her role as Education Director, Janet nurtures connections and the creation of opportunities across every aspect of AOB's work.

Janet spearheads the matchmaking process between schools and visiting authors, leading lively back-and-forth discussions with others matching each book to its most appropriate audience.

Through the two regular AOB book groups she organizes with Kathie, Janet harnesses her Masters level training and time as a reading and writing teacher to create memorable experiences through reading, writing, and the creation of art for the elementary and middle school participants. Her passionate advocacy for social justice is often reflected in her curriculum planning with teachers, a reflection of years spent as an attorney in the DC Public Defender Service. A constant and tireless collaborator, Janet has widely expanded AOB's network of community partnerships. (At left,

Janet confers with a reader at Burroughs Literacy Night; photo courtesy of [Mike Ferguson](#).)

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## Amy Kim

With years of university legal work in her background, Amy slid seamlessly into the role of Development Director for AOB in 2014. An Open Book's grant researcher and writer, Amy also coordinates the annual appeal letter as well as various fundraising efforts throughout the year. Amy's eye for detail gets put to regular use as she places all of AOB's many book orders and enters reams of information into the database. Amy also coordinated last year's intensive survey of teachers and authors. Recently, Amy has taken on management of five [Little Free Libraries](#) as part of a new AOB initiative to offer a variety of give-away books to students in between our author events. We look forward to sharing more on the LFL's soon! (Above, Amy with Isatou Ceesay last year.)



## Kathie Weinberg

The "plus one" of the AOB staff, Kathie is our Program Coordinator and MVV--most valuable volunteer. A retired teen services librarian, Kathie lends her invaluable expertise recruiting authors, coordinating high school visits, and running, with Janet, AOB's two book groups. Kathie's many talents are recognized on a national level, and her work with partners like the Library of Congress Young Readers Center and We Need Diverse Books connects AOB with like-minded entities and initiatives. An Open Book counts its lucky asterisks to have Kathie's frequent contributions to our

programs! (At left, Kathie introducing Steve Sheinkin last fall.)

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## Kit Ballenger

The new kid on the block, Kit joined AOB midwinter as the Director of Public Outreach. A former child advocacy attorney, newly minted librarian, and veteran of several literacy nonprofit boards, Kit helps plan and execute author visits, works on AOB communications (including the website and newsletters), and is assisting Dara and the Board with strategic planning as AOB moves toward its sixth year. Kit recently began cataloguing AOB's book collection and will serve as resident librarian. (At right, Kit with author Laura Melmed and a young reader from Ballou's Early

Learning center.)



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## Volunteers

Small in numbers but mighty in scope, An Open Book staff is grateful for the contributions of time, energy, and enthusiasm from event volunteers **Denise Mitchell**, **Alice Hayes**, **Sylvia Dinale** and **Diana Rojas**. Their assistance with large or complex presentations is a tremendous boon to AOB!

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April showers may have brought, well, May showers here in Washington, DC, but An Open Book Foundation put galoshes to good use and marched on to offer a record-setting number of events and programs this month. AOB continues to offer innovative, intimate interactions in its effort to promote literacy among children throughout this region.

I am myself lucky to work with such a dynamic, dedicated staff and group of volunteers, and AOB is made all the better for their constant innovation and collaboration on behalf of the students, teachers, and authors we serve. Thank you to An Open Book Foundation's dedicated friends and donors for making our work possible.

With warm wishes,

Dara La Porte  
Founder and Executive Director

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