

# Encouraging Young Readers

BY LYNN RUBRIGHT

Note from the editor: How can you encourage young readers? By getting in the classroom. Read on to find out how St. Louis storyteller and author, Lynn Rubright, does this using her book *Mama's Window* (Lee and Low Books).

My partner, Diane Davenport (dance and music specialist) and I (as author storyteller) are concluding the school year with a residency on *Mama's Window* at Pershing Elementary School in U. City. The two fifth grade teachers “kicked off the residency” by reading *Mama* to the students.

Diane comes to both classes first to show pictures of the swamp I took when writing the book. Children call out word images generated by the book and my photos: slimy, dark, foreboding, frightening, surprising, scary. All words are collected on the board as the bank. Children “mix and match” words from this bank to write their own Swamp Poems.

Each child receives a copy of *Mama's Window*, funded by the residency, and they begin reading it on their own or in small literacy circles. I come and talk about writing the book – the research – and tell bits of the story.

Diane returns with a 40 foot piece of brown gauzy fabric. The children get underneath it and swirl it around as if they are the “angry storm water” that overturns Sugar’s boat. Some of the children play percussive instruments as the WATER gets frenzied. A child playing Sugar – capsizes in his imaginary boat and swims ashore. Dramatic and *fun!*

I have written a playlet for each chapter of *Mama* and we spend several weeks, during weekly visit by Diane and me, reading the scripts (reader’s theater) with expression and fluency – skills too often ignored by classroom teachers due to *time*.

At Author’s Signing Day, I come and sign each child’s book and children act out VOICES, a script that has short snippets of the story written from the Point of View of each character at some point in the story.

When we did this residency several months ago at Barbara Jordan Elementary in U. City, the superintendent and assistant superintendent of the U. City Schools observed. It was very exciting to get administrators to take time to observe children’s total involvement in a story.

Truly, authors, you contribute to literacy in a most meaningful and creative way when you bring your books to life like this. Especially, when each child has a copy of the book, or a chapter printed as a handout, to take home and read again.

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Lynn Rubright uses her chapter book, *Mama's Window* (Lee and Low Books) through 6 in area schools. She is an a professor emerita (Webster University, St. Louis) and professional storyteller who gives inspirational workshops for all ages on the art of storytelling. She particularly enjoys helping students mine their own family folklore for telling and

writing. She co-produced an EMMY award winning documentary, “Oh Freedom After While: Sharecropper Protest in SE MO in 1939,” co-founded the Metro Theater Company, and the St. Louis Storytelling Festival and was designer and director of Project TELL (Teaching English through Living Language) for Kirkwood, MO, schools. She enjoys being nudged by her SCBWI writers group who insist she work on written versions of stories she has been performing for years.

## Meet Lynn Alpert



Have you noticed that Mo Scibbles has a new look? That's because Lynn Alpert has volunteered to do the design work for our newsletter leaving SueBE to focus on gathering material and editing.

Lynn is an illustrator and graphic designer working in the St. Louis area. While she works toward her first picture book,

Lynn has her own illustration/design studio, Lynn Alpert Studios (<http://lynnalpert.com>). Among other things, she designed the logo for the Diabetes Wellness Center of St. Louis and A.G. Edwards 2007 United Way Campaign (<http://lynnalpert.com/design.html>)

Please join us in welcoming Lynn to the team and giving her a special thank you for volunteering her time to benefit us all.

