

VAASL Gold - 50 Years of Leading Learning

2025 KEYNOTE SPEAKERS



Grace Lin

NY Times bestselling author/illustrator, won the Newbery Honor for “Where the Mountain Meets the Moon” and the Theodor Geisel Honor for “Ling and Ting.” Her novel “When the Sea Turned to Silver” was a National Book Award Finalist and her picture book, “A Big Mooncake for Little Star” was awarded the Caldecott Honor. Grace is also an occasional commentator for New England Public Radio, a reviewer for the NY Times, a video essayist for PBS NewsHour, and the speaker of the popular TEDx talk, “The Windows and Mirrors of Your Child’s Bookshelf,” as well as the co-host of the Book Friends Forever podcast. In 2016, Grace’s art was displayed at the White House where Grace, herself, was recognized by President Obama’s office as a Champion of Change for Asian American and Pacific Islander Art and Storytelling. In 2022, Grace was awarded the Children’s Literature Legacy Award from the American Library Association.



India Hill Brown

NAACP Image Award Nominee
Outstanding Literary Work for Youth/Teens
202 ALSC Notable Children’s Book
2022 Sasquatch Nominee

India Hill Brown is an author with a passion for writing, reading, and all things literary. Her debut novel, *The Forgotten Girl*, has been nominated for an NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Literary Work in Youth/Teens. It’s both a spooky original ghost story and a timely and important storyline about reclaiming an abandoned segregated cemetery. Her second novel, *The Girl in the Lake*, reminds readers that the truth is scarier than fiction, especially when it comes to historical truths and lived realities whose impacts echo through the generations. Her latest book, *Rhythm & Muse*, is noted as a *Cinderella* meets *Cyrano* in a pitch-perfect YA rom-com that is a celebration of Black joy, first crushes, and putting your heart on the line for love.



Dr. John Almarode

*Professor & Assistant AUH
James Madison University*

John's journey into education began at age ten when he stepped into Room 30 at Stuarts Draft Middle School and met his sixth-grade science teacher, Ms. Cross. That moment sparked a lifelong passion for teaching and learning. Today,

John serves as a Professor of Education at James Madison University, where he teaches future educators how the science of learning and classroom design can maximize student achievement.

John is a bestselling author with over two dozen books focused on evidence-based teaching, learning environments, and professional learning communities. He has worked with educators across the globe, including school librarians, to translate research into meaningful classroom and school-wide practices. As a key contributor to John Hattie's *Visible Learning* research and co-developer of the *PLC+* framework, John emphasizes collaboration, clarity, and equity in education. His work has been recognized nationally, including presentations to Congress and the U.S. Department of Education. His honors include the Sarah Miller Luck Endowed Professorship, Virginia's Outstanding Faculty Award, and the Madison Vision Teaching Award.

For John, the role of the school librarian—as a learning leader and instructional partner—is vital. His guiding belief remains: *every learner deserves a great education—not by chance, but by design.*



Amy Hermon

Library Media Specialist
Wayne State University

Amy Hermon, a *library media specialist* for more than 14 years, is the host of *School Librarians United*, a weekly podcast for and by school librarians. During the pandemic she recorded several episodes addressing the challenges of virtual programming in school libraries and provided a platform for presenters whose conferences had been

cancelled. The podcast, created by Hermon in 2018, now has listeners in all 50 states and 110 countries. Hermon was included on Library Journal's 2022 list of Movers and Shakers in the Community Builders category.

Q. What inspired you to get a Masters in Library and Information Science?

A. My lightbulb moment came when I was teaching high school social studies. I was brand new to the school and drowning in lesson plans. I didn't want to let my department know just how overwhelmed I was. Carla, the librarian, came to my rescue. I knew I could ask Carla for resources and judgement-free support. Carla was, without fail, the happiest person in the building. And that's when I asked Carla what I needed to do to become a school librarian.

Q. Why did you decide to create a podcast for school librarians?

A. I've been an avid listener of podcasts for years and I love that they are free, customizable and convenient. I looked for a podcast that would help me do my job. There were already plenty of edtech, author/kidlit and podcasts for classroom teachers. I decided to create a platform to share resources, exchange ideas and build a listening community. My podcast, *School Librarians United*, shares not just my own perspectives but includes conversations with school librarians from across the country. I can collaborate with school librarians remotely, record and edit an episode whenever it works in my schedule.

To listen to the podcast, visit <https://schoollibrariansunited.libsyn.com> .

Also look for break-out sessions from all of our keynotes!