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Spotlights: Faculty, Alumni, Festival

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Spotlight—Adjunct Faculty



Teresa Smith Welsh, M.L.I.S., Ph.D., is a native Mississippian who graduated *summa cum laude* from the University of Southern Mississippi with a B.A. in anthropology, a Certificate in Humanities, and minors in social studies and classical studies.

At the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK), she had a year of graduate study in anthropology including classes in mythology, classical archaeology, and forensic anthropology with Dr. Bill Bass (*The Body Farm*) before changing her major to LIS and earning an MLIS degree while working as an archival assistant on the Sen. Howard H. Baker papers.

After graduating and working a few years at Oak Ridge National Lab in Laboratory Records, she returned to UTK to earn a Ph.D. in Information Sciences in 2002. She was awarded the Hilton A. Smith Graduate Fellowship as well as Best Technical Project Award and Best Doctoral Paper Award from the School of Information Sciences.

Dr. Welsh began her teaching career at Southern Miss in the summer of 2003 and was awarded the College of Education and Psychology 2007 Excellence in Teaching Award. She served as Director of the School of Library and Information Science from 2015 to 2021, and after 18 years of service to the University, retired from full-time faculty at the rank of Professor. In 2021, she was honored with the title of Professor Emeritus of Library and Information Science, and she currently serves as Adjunct Faculty for SLIS. She created two USM Foundation Funds to honor her time at SLIS and USM: Dr. Teresa Welsh LIS Scholarship Endowment and Dr. Teresa Welsh Children's Book Festival Lecture Endowment. The Lecture Endowment is to sponsor a noted scholar at the annual book festival to present a keynote address related to the history of children's literature or another scholarly topic related to children's or young adult literature. If you would like to contribute to either of these funds in honor or memory of someone, go to <http://usmfoundation.com/tw>

Spotlight—Alum



Marjorie Hills was destined to become a librarian. Some of her earliest memories include being read to at bedtime, a ritual that fueled her imagination so that as she grew, she began writing her own poems and short stories.

Her love of reading led her to Iberia Parish Library, in her hometown of New Iberia, LA. Throughout her school years, she was rarely seen without a book in hand and could often be found in the library, at one point even joining her high school's Library Club.

Marjorie went on to earn her B.A. in English with a minor in psychology from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. She began working at Iberia Parish Library in 2003 as a part-time clerk during her last semester of college. In twenty years, she has worked in branches as part of the circulation staff and as the head of the system's Reference and Interlibrary Loan Department.

In 2021, Marjorie decided that it was time she realized her dream of earning her Master of Library and Information Science degree. She began The University of Southern Mississippi's program in January 2022 and graduated with her MLIS and the Graduate Certificate in Youth Services and Literature in December 2023. The Iberia Parish Library Board of Control chose Marjorie as the replacement for the retiring Library Director, in April 2023, and she began her new job in July.

She is delighted to be leading her childhood library system forward and is grateful for the support and energy of the staff who see her vision of a bright future for Iberia Parish Library and who are on board, ready, and willing to collaborate as a team, to meet the needs of their community. Marjorie believes wholeheartedly in the continued relevance of libraries as educational and entertainment centers in communities and enjoys pointing out that in addition to literacy learning, libraries can positively contribute to every aspect of an individual's life.

Marjorie is proud to be a librarian. She hopes to inspire someone else to reach for their dreams, to love libraries, and to become a librarian just as has happened to her.

Fay B. Kaigler Children’s Book Festival Spotlight

The 2024 Fay B. Kaigler Children’s Book Festival will take place April 10-12 on USM’s Hattiesburg, MS campus. The festival includes a robust lineup of both keynote speakers and educators, and will welcome attendees both in-person and online (via Aquila). This year’s Medallion winner is celebrated children’s and young adult author Cynthia Leitich Smith.

Cynthia Leitich Smith – 2024 Southern Miss Medallion Winner

Cynthia Leitich Smith (a Muscogee citizen) had many jobs before officially becoming an author, including working as a legal aid for two major government organizations. Though she put her law and journalism degrees to good use earlier in her career, Smith’s work in publishing has earned her worldwide recognition. In addition to being the 2021 NSK Neustadt Laureate and a NYTimes bestselling author, Smith is the author-curator of Heartdrum, a Native-focused imprint of HarperCollins, which she helped launch. In addition to her work in publishing, Smith’s body of work ranges from children’s picture books to two series of young adult novels. Several of her books—like *Jingle Dancer* and *Indian Shoes*—show the different experiences young Native children face in their communities, both rural and urban. Smith’s young adult novels focus on dark fantasy plotlines, full of were-creatures, vampires, and other supernatural beings.

Overall, Smith’s career shows her dedication, both to her craft and to the children’s literature community at large. We’re honored to welcome her to the festival this year!

Lesa-Cline Ransome

Lesa Cline-Ransome is a prolific author with many books and awards under her belt. *Before She Was Harriet*, her biography of Harriet Tubman, was nominated for an NAACP image award and received a Coretta Scott King Honor Award for Illustration. *Finding Langston*, the first novel in a three-part series, focuses on a young boy growing up during the Great Migration, won the Scott O’Dell Award for Historical Fiction in 2019. It also received the Coretta Scott King Award Author Honor. Cline-Ransome is a MacDowell Fellow and 2022 NAIBA Legacy recipient, who spends much of her time writing, listening to music, reading, and spending time with her family. Cline-Ransome initially studied journalism, but ultimately decided she was better suited to using her way with words in other avenues – like children’s literature!

James Ransome

James Ransome was interested in art and illustration since his childhood in North Carolina. As he grew older, Ransome practiced his talents, learning everything he could about illustration, animation, and composition, eventually earning a BFA from Pratt Institute. Ransome has been named one of the 75 authors and illustrators everyone should know by The Children’s Book Council, and his work has received numerous awards. The Creation earned both a Coretta Scott King Honor Award for Illustration and the IBBY Honor Award, while Uncle Jed’s Barbershop also won a Coretta Scott King Honor Award for Illustration. Several of Ransome’s books have been featured on Reading Rainbow, and Ransome’s work has been exhibited in shows throughout the country. Ransome has created commissioned murals for notable locations like the Indianapolis Children’s Museum, The national Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati, and the Hemphill Branch Library in Greensboro, NC.

Jason Chin – de Grummond Lecturer

Jason Chin never believed being a career artist was possible until he saw picture book illustrator Trina Schart Hyman present at his school. Suddenly, a whole world of possibility opened up and helped lead the way for Chin to become an illustrator and author in his own right.

After working on several other projects, Chin illustrated *Watercress* (written by Andrea Wang), which won a 2022 Caldecott Medal and a 2022 Newbery Honor, among other awards. Chin tenderly illustrates a story about family history, cultural differences, and the need to fit in.

Chin’s most recent work, *The Universe in You: A Microscopic Journey* helps share what makes humans tick, looking at the smallest organs and systems of the body.

Chin lives with his family in Vermont, where he continues to foster his love of science and art.

Juana Martinez-Neal – Colleen Salley Storytelling Award Winner

Juana Martinez-Neal is an author and illustrator of books for young readers. She has illustrated retellings of beloved fairy tales like *La Madre Goose* and *La Princesa and the Pea*, which was a 2018 Pura Belpré Medal Award winner for Illustration and a 2018 Ezra Jack Keats Illustration Award Nominee. She has also illustrated original stories as well. For example, Martinez-Neal’s work on *Fry Bread* helped it earn Both a Robert F. Sibert Medal Award and a Charlotte Zolotow Honor, in addition to many other recognitions.

Martinez-Neal's debut as an author-illustrator came with *Alma and How She Got Her Name*, which earned a Caldecott Honor and an Ezra Jack Keats Award Writer Honor in 2019. In *Alma*, a young girl learns the origin of her name and celebrates the rich traditions of her family. The story is gentle, and the message reassuring to readers both young and old. Whether she's illustrating fiction or nonfiction, or crafting a story meant to help all readers feel included, Juana Martinez-Neal tells a story with her work and invites readers to join her for the beautiful ride.

Liz Kleinrock – Southern Miss SLIS Lecturer

Liz Kleinrock wears many hats; she's an author, a nationally recognized antiracist educator, a scholar, and a consultant. She graduated from Washington University before spending some time teaching in Oakland with AmeriCorps. Outside of the traditional classroom, Kleinrock teaches both children and adults about antibias and antiracist ideas and founded Teach & Transform, an antiracist and antibias consultancy and facilitation company.

She received a 2018 Learning for Justice Award for Excellence in Teaching and delivered a TED talk, "Education Everywhere" in 2019. Kleinrock's first book, *Start Here Start Now: A Guide to Antibias and Antiracist Work in Your School Community*, features actionable objectives and information for teachers looking to make their classrooms an antiracist and antibias space. She has also written two picture books, *Come and Join Us: 18 Holidays Celebrated All Year Long* and *Eyes that Weave the World's Wonders*.

Pedro Martin

Pedro Martin was a Hallmark artist for 27 years – where he created Asteroid Andy – before publishing his debut graphic memoir *Mexikid*. Martin initially began collecting his family stories in a series of web comics called "Mexikid Stories," but the tale of his family soon grew too large for a short series. And his debut graphic memoir was born. Martin is a master of multiple illustration styles, able to adapt to fit any children's book or design project. *Mexikid* recently earned a Newbery Honor, a Pura Belpré Author and Illustrator Award, and was listed on New York Times Best Children's Books of 2023. It has also been named a Best Book of the Year by NPR, Kirkus, Booklist, Publisher's Weekly, and the New York and Chicago Public Libraries.

Please visit <https://www.usm.edu/childrens-book-festival> for information on registration and updates on the Festival. Please email Festival Coordinator Dr. Mary Osborne at mary.a.osborne@usm.edu with any questions you might have about registration, the festival in general, or to be added to the Kaigler mailing list.



The poster for the 2024 Fay B. Kaigler Children's Book Festival is set against a purple background with a decorative yellow and orange zigzag border at the top and bottom. At the top center is the University of Southern Mississippi logo, with the text "THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI" and "School of Library and Information Science presents the". Below this, the event title "2024 Fay B. Kaigler Children's Book Festival" is written in a mix of bold sans-serif and elegant script fonts. The dates "APRIL 10-12" and "Hattiesburg Campus" are prominently displayed. A central purple banner reads "Celebrating over 50 years of promoting excellence in children's literature with Southern Miss Medallion Winner CYNTHIA LIETICH SMITH". To the left of the speaker list is a colorful illustration of a young girl in traditional Indigenous attire. The "Additional Speakers" list includes Juana Martinez-Neal, Jason Chin, Lesa Cline-Ransome, James Ransome, Pedro Martin, and Liz Kleinrock. Below the list, it says "Featuring the Ezra Jack Keats Award Ceremony" with the website "usm.edu/childrens-book-festival". The bottom of the poster features logos for the Magnolia Book Awards, the Ezra Jack Keats Award, the Fay B. Kaigler Children's Book Festival, and the Calumet Collection.