Learning Resource Spotlight: Allan Cutler

You may remember the weekly visit to the school library in your day as a nice read aloud followed by a brief respite from those rigid classroom desks and some freedom to wander among stacks of books. In Stanley’s library, kids get plenty of such curiosity-driven exploration. Every K-1-2 and 3-4-5 class hits the library weekly. Our Librarian, Allan Cutler, teaches a lesson for each K-5 class and teaches two middle school skills classes, too. “I work to help kids develop a library collection with books that are high interest,” says Allan, “and I help students find titles that support the curriculum and a variety of topics and interests.”

While the beauty of the library is heeding the quiet call of a hidden book, Allan also takes advantage of some non-analog literacy resources: He augments the hard-copy experience with tech resources like the database World Book Online, or he may present media on projector and speakers. Allan stays tuned to our classroom teachers to incorporate lessons in the library that relate to classroom Time Travel & World Exploration (a.k.a. TTWE) studies in 3-4-5. He also talks about literature themes and big ideas with K-1-2 students – all of which supports literacy and a love of reading.

On Stanley Staff since 2013, Allan looks forward to bringing new information and understanding to students – as Allan says, “seeing kids light up as they make connections with what they may already know and what I'm introducing to them. I love helping them take their knowledge to deeper levels, discussing big ideas and small details that are manifestations of those large realities, and searching for understanding even if there will always be more questions at the end of that search.” Making multiple connections of ideas and events, says Allan, is how students learn a system they can then participate in independently and experience and learn from on their own and with others.

Allan works with Amy Pregulman to help students ID just-right books. “Besides having freedom to choose books of interest,” says Allan, “students receive our guidance in finding books that won't be too hard or too easy to read so they can grow as readers.” Working as Stanley Librarian since 2013, Allan has found his niche in this caring community. “Stanley is a school where you can be yourself, are respected and honored for your work, and can focus on what's important for children.”

A classroom teacher in both public and private schools as well as a librarian and tech teacher in DPS for many years, Allan saw that public education was becoming an increasingly top-down model. “Many politicians, education policy people, and some in the tech business community spend time and a lot of money looking for some magic bullet program that will educate students and raise test scores (‘data drives instruction’ being the buzzwords in public education these days),” says Allan. “Meanwhile, schools are ignoring research done by education professionals. No one seems to be investing in smaller class sizes and more teachers. This has made the move to Stanley all the more amazing and rewarding. Being at Stanley is a reminder that models of teaching and learning that actually stand behind their philosophy, do exist and thrive.

“I've had experience in a variety of types of school and communities over the last two-plus decades. This gives me a pretty good perspective from which to judge how schools work, what is driving the decisions made about how to educate and whether or not the systems in place work or are based on what works in education. I feel good about standing up for students’ rights to a quality education and teachers deserving quality training and support as they grow in their careers.”
When asked for a favorite quote, Allan responds with the words of Henry David Thoreau: “‘If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away.’ This quote speaks to standing up for the independent self,” sas Allan, “and it also serves to remind that others are also unique and acting from their own understanding.”

Allan’s students know him as their librarian, the guy who teaches a fun lesson, and supports their learning and growing, and who also has expectations of respect and trust and caring. Those expectations go both ways, too. Allan’s impassioned about standing up for students and teachers, speaking out for them and for the community, and teaching about the real world through literature, non-fiction, and discussion.

Outside of the stacks, Allan advocates for his own crew of learners and thinkers. “I have two children, who I love to be with and talk with. I’ve been married 22 years and have a great partner in my wife.” A sentimental native of California (he was born in Waterville, Iowa, and moved to D.C. long ago before settling for awhile on the West Coast), Allan and his wife moved here in 2001. Says Allan, “Moving to Denver brought a lot of things to fruition I was hoping for, even though I do miss some aspects of Northern California culture, climate, and scenery.”

You may wonder what Stanley’s librarian is bookmarking for himself right now ... He’s reading a book called “109 East Palace” (about the Manhattan project), discovered over a spring-break trip to Los Alamos. Allan says he reads a lot of history, and if pushed, he typically counts “Lord of the Rings” as his favorite “book – yes, it’s three now, but was it was originally one,” he points out. As you can imagine, Allan likes to read, and write, and also finds time to “play music, sleep, imagine, talk with my children, travel to the quiet places.” You can find him making not-so-quiet music at Stanley’s Auction this Saturday with his band “Me Me Monster.”