We’ve Got You (Book) Covered

One of the best parts of attending any large library conference is the BOOKS! Everywhere, BOOKS! After attending AASL twice, I had an idea what to expect regarding access to advanced reader copies (ARCs) and giveaways, and ALA Midwinter was much the same. In fact, it felt a little like *the* place to be to see up and coming titles and series. Perhaps that was because of the buzz of anticipation over the Youth Media Awards and knowing attendees were on the search for the newest, best books for their libraries.

No matter where you looked, publishers had myriad books on display. Their reps were ready to answer questions, offer an ARC of a particularly inviting title, or encourage you to pick up and see for yourself if a book would meet the needs of your library. You could start a conversation with just about anyone within earshot, comparing notes on books already read, books waiting to be read, or books newly discovered, or give or receive a book recommendation. As the exhibit hall opened, conference goers flooded through the doors and those wonderful free tote bags were soon filled with books.

Publishers hosted several 30-minute segments sharing their newest titles throughout the conference as well. Librarians would gather around the stage and were treated to multiple book talks, usually based on a theme. I listened to one set of book talks on new international titles, and one on new middle grade books.

The scheduled author signings kept the book love energy high, too. For most author signings, you could stand in line, receive a free, signed book and pose for a quick photo with the author. I became quite the sensation with my 5/6 Battle of the Books team when I shared that I had met an author of one of this year's battle books. My personal highlight was receiving a signed copy of Kwame Alexander’s newest book, Swing.

The most memorable part of the book extravaganza for me was attending the Youth Media Awards. The ballroom filled with librarians eager to hear the award winners and the anticipation was truly palpable. I was humbled to realize that my focus on the two ‘biggies’, the Newbery and Caldecott, had caused me to miss out on the richness that the other awards bring to the award table. I appreciated and took special note of the Schneider Family Book Award because of its focus on “artistic expression of the disability experience for child and adolescent audiences” and the Stonewall Book Awards, which are given for “exceptional merit relating to the gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender experience.”
The enthusiasm and energy surrounding the discussion and distribution of books is a compelling reason to attend large conferences like ALA Midwinter. Publishers and librarians alike are in the business of pairing the right book to the right reader, and being able to see so many titles in one place allows for a unique collection development experience.