

Oregon Authors Project as a Collection Development Resource

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The Oregon Authors Project (Oregon Library Association, 2024) is an online resource that provides information and resources about authors who call or have called Oregon their home. Not only does it feature new publications by local authors, but it also highlights authors who identify as BIPOC as well as LGBTQIA+ which can be very helpful in collection development for these communities. While there has been progress towards more inclusive characters by publishers, it can still be hard to find books with diverse content, especially those featuring Native or Indigenous main characters, characters who are English language learners, characters with nonconforming gender, and characters with disabilities (Ishizuka, 2018).

A very important aspect to the Oregon Authors Project is that users can easily identify local authors who are BIPOC or identify with the LGBTQIA+ communities. There are shockingly few resources that highlight either of these communities and even fewer that are Oregon-specific. The Oregon Authors Project seeks to change this by increasing the visibility of these writers. Ultimately, the Oregon Authors Project would like to become a crucial resource for libraries across Oregon and to the general public by identifying publications of local BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ authors.

Who exactly is an Oregon author? To be considered an Oregon author, they must have published at least one book with an ISBN/ISSN. Additionally, an author must have either been born in Oregon, has been or is a current resident of Oregon, or has spent a significant portion of their writing career in Oregon. Articles are excluded. If an author published a book and article, only the book would be included. If a book were published without an ISBN, it would also be excluded.

The Oregon Authors Project has a long history of supporting both readers' advisory and collection development by providing lists of local authors. The earliest rendition of the Oregon Authors Project stretches back to the 1933/34 edition of the *Oregon Blue Book* which merely listed the author's name, book title, and publisher information for that year (Wann, 2014). The core purpose is still the same 90 years later: to connect readers to Oregon authors.

As the project has continued over the years, it has come to provide important snapshots into the literary history of Oregon. We can see what Oregon writers were writing about during a particular year or decade. For example, one can see titles published during the recent pandemic years or during World War II.

Early editions of the *Oregon Authors* were only a few pages long, including 30 to 40 books, and distributed free of charge until the cost of production became too much in the 1990s. In 1998–99, the *Oregon Authors* Committee Chair Craig Smith began exploring ways to use the internet to create a “data bank” which ultimately led to the *Oregon Authors* publication going digital (Wann, 2014). Between 2017–2021, Portland State University took over responsibility for the *Oregon Authors*, during which time it existed as a WordPress blog. Due to COVID-19, the Portland State position overseeing the project was cut, and the domain name was taken over by a gambling institute.

Oregon Library Association (OLA) took the opportunity in 2021 to reevaluate the mission and goals of the *Oregon Authors*. Under new leadership with OLA, the Oregon Authors Project was rebranded and a new website was launched in the spring of 2023 as a combined database and blog that is freely available to all.

Since its relaunch, the Oregon Authors Project has experienced significant growth, adding over 1,300 authors in the past year; it currently includes rich information for over 3,100 Oregon authors. During transition periods, the project has had its share of ups and downs. It was discovered that WordPress data that contained information about authors became corrupted and some data was lost. On the positive side, as metadata was added to the new database our team of volunteers began to discover new publications and to correct errors along the way. As a result, the accuracy of the information in the database ultimately improved.

We on the Oregon Authors Project committee are always open to suggestions for increasing this resource’s usefulness. A children’s librarian suggested including a limiter for early readers, so we expanded the audiences to include early readers, picture books, juveniles, middle grades, young adults, and adults. Similarly, the OLA Children’s Services Division asked to identify authors who are willing to speak at library programs. Not only did we add a field for this in our database, but we also included a quick link for speakers on the home page. We implemented another suggestion to create an interactive map of Oregon to visualize how authors connect to Oregon.

In the Oregon Authors Project, author profiles typically include genres, audiences, publication dates, newest title, and all of an author’s publications (publication title, publication year, and ISBN/ISSN/OCLC/ASIN). Images of the author are included whenever possible, along with a short biography (200 words) and author’s website. If the author does not have a site, alternative URLs such as the Oregon History Project or Wikipedia may be used. A check box indicates whether an author identifies as BIPOC and with the LGBTQIA+ community, and an optional box lists ethnicity. The author’s most recent geographic connection to Oregon is included. When either city and county can’t be identified, they are listed as unknown.

If an author is interviewed by Oregon Authors Project, a link to an author’s interview is provided in their profile along with the date of the interview. There is a category entitled “Well-known” that is an eclectic collection of additional information such as best sellers (*USA Today*, *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, etc.), literary awards (Oregon Book Awards, Newbery, etc.), classics (Beverly Cleary or Ursula Le Guin), and book-based movies/TV/streaming (Frank Herbert’s *Dune* or Randy Alcorn’s *Courageous*).

If collection development specialists need specific genres, they have their choice of 16 genres:

- Fiction
- Fantasy
- Graphic Novels & Manga
- Mystery & Thrillers
- Romance
- Science Fiction
- Nonfiction (all)
- Biographies & Memoirs
- Cooking & Wine
- Humor
- History
- NW History
- Outdoors & Travel
- Poetry
- Religion
- Sports

Users also can use the search function for specific titles, authors, and other categories. If all of this is not enough, users have full access to the entire database so they can filter, search, and sort however they wish.

The Oregon Authors Project will continue to grow. In the future, the committee would like to explore ways to include cultural materials that have not been traditionally published, such as stories by Native American tribal nations. The Oregon Authors Project is also planning to incorporate Oregon illustrators.

The Oregon Authors Project is always looking for volunteers, and this would be a wonderful way for new librarians to branch out professionally. The easiest way to get involved is to submit new publications by Oregon authors through the website at www.olaoregonauthors.org. There are more advanced opportunities such as data entry, maintaining the blog, marketing and outreach, interviewing authors, or writing about an author. We also strongly encourage authors themselves to submit their own information.

If you would like to get more involved or have any questions or suggestions, please contact the Oregon Authors Project committee co-chairs, John Repplinger and Deidra Menser, at olaoregonauthorscomm@olaweb.org.

The Oregon Authors Project will have significant appeal for public, school, and academic libraries across the Pacific Northwest. As authors and new publications are added, this will become an increasingly valuable resource.

References

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