storyline

Spring/Summer 2026

The Magazine of the
Oak Park Public Library



Book discussions
Page 9

RiverSong quilt show
Page 6

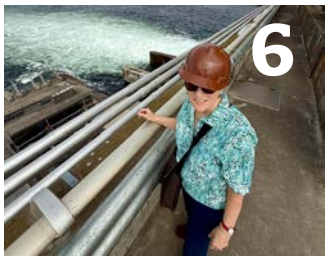
'Young people are our now'
Page 10

OAK PARK PUBLIC LIBRARY

In this issue



Page 4 Older Adult Coffee Hour
Every month, self-identified older adults gather to catch up with friends and neighbors and meet new people with similar interests. "Believe me, this group is quite lively, and I certainly enjoy learning from them," one participant says.



Page 6 Stitching science into art
Local artist Lindsay Olson, who is focused on regional and national water issues, curated *RiverSong*, an exhibit of quilts celebrating the Mississippi Watershed. See it at the Main Library this spring.



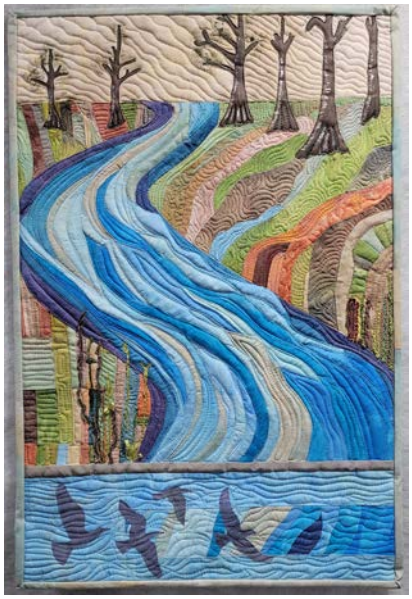
Page 8 Chair Yoga
"In library spaces, I often get people who have never done yoga or are returning after a long time, which is always exciting," says instructor DuShaun Branch.



Page 9 Join a book discussion
Check out our diverse mix of book groups that meet regularly at the Main Library, with discussion led by library staff members.



Page 10 Lights, Camera, Community
"Everyone has a story, a purpose, and here is proof," says James Turner, who runs the video production program for high schoolers.



ON THE COVER

The Shared River by Marisa Marquez is one of the quilts in *RiverSong*, a traveling exhibit that will be on display in the Main Library Gallery May 19–June 27. Each quilt in the exhibit explores aspects of the Mississippi River Basin. Marquez says her piece is a "tribute to a lifeline that connects landscapes, cultures, and histories." Read more about the *RiverSong* exhibit and its curator, local artist Lindsay Olson, on pages 6–7.

This magazine is printed on post-consumer recycled paper and printed locally.

We love to hear how you use your public library!
If you have a story to share with us for a future issue or any comments or questions, please contact us at **communications@oppl.org**.

Looking for more events?
To see all upcoming events, pick up monthly print calendars for kids & families, middle & high schoolers, adults, and older adults (60+) at all library locations, and visit **oppl.org/calendar**.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Elsworth Carman
elsworthc@oppl.org

EDITORIAL TEAM
Editor:
Kristen Romanowski
Graphic Designer:
Gabriela Denton

BOARD OF LIBRARY TRUSTEES
Find board meeting information and meet the trustees at **oppl.org/board**.



Take the survey here

Planning for the future

Welcome to the Spring/Summer 2026 issue of Storyline. As we enter this new season, we are focusing on how the library functions day-to-day and how our facilities can better serve the community in the years to come.

I'm excited to share that we are currently creating a Strategic Facilities Plan to serve as a clear roadmap for future improvements to the Main Library. This planning process does not mean we are looking for a new building—we love the Main Library!—nor does it mean we are starting an immediate capital campaign or seeking additional funding. Instead, this work ensures that when we are ready to make changes, every improvement will be intentional, fiscally responsible, and based on your needs.

Help shape our future: The community survey

Our approach to this plan is to "listen first." We have already begun gathering information from our staff and the library board to understand how our buildings operate day-to-day. To lead this process, we are working with Woolpert, the successors to the building's original architects, Nagel Hartray. The team brings a deep institutional knowledge of Oak Park that is incredibly beneficial to this project.

In May, our focus shifts to public input. We are running a community survey from early May through mid-June. This survey will be available via our monthly email newsletters and the Village of Oak Park's OP/FYI newsletter, and you can access it through the QR code on this page.

To ensure we hear from as many residents as possible, we are also engaging through:

- In-person conversations: Representatives from Woolpert will be in the Main Library Lobby during Day in Our Village (Sunday, June 7), to chat with residents and gather feedback in person.
- Accessible paper options: We are providing paper survey options to ensure technology is not a barrier to participation for anyone who wants to share their voice.
- Focus groups: We are in the early stages of planning community focus groups and will share more details as those conversations take shape.

Empowering our youth: Lights, Camera, Community

While we plan for the future of our physical space, we are also celebrating the inspiring work happening inside it. I invite you to learn more about the Lights, Camera, Community program, a weekly after-school program for high school students at the Main Library (see pages 10–11). This program is a great example of how the library provides space for connection, belonging, and the opportunity to try something new.

I also encourage you to visit the *RiverSong* quilt exhibit in the Main Library Gallery from May 19 to June 27, to mark your calendars for the Friends of the Library Book Fair on July 10–12, and to join our summer reading programs for all ages, which run from June 1 through August 31.

Thank you for being a part of the Oak Park Public Library.
—Elsworth Carman



Older Adult Coffee Hour: ‘Everyone has some knowledge, wisdom & humor to share’



Before she moved to Oak Park, Marti Middlebrook already loved visiting the Main Library with her granddaughters. But when she came in on her own one Friday morning, she got pulled in a little further.

Older Adult Coffee Hour was happening, as it does on the first Friday of every month.

After “admitting to myself that I am now an older adult,” Marti says, she joined in. “I found it welcoming and informative.”

The monthly coffee hour is an opportunity for self-identified older adults to catch up with friends and neighbors and meet new people with similar interests.

They get together for an hour of relaxed conversation followed by a half-hour activity—for example, staff-led tours of the library’s art collection, Creative Studio, and Special Collections.

In addition to learning about library offerings and local events, Marti says, “I have made a friend or two and will continue to attend as often as possible. Thank you for making an Oak Park newcomer feel so welcome.”

In the 2020 census, one in six Americans was 65 or over. Library Assistant Janet Lorch, who has been running the program since 2024, says it’s important to tailor some library programming toward older adults.

“It’s one way to demonstrate that their interests and needs are prioritized and valued,” she says.

Participation has grown over time, through word of mouth and intentional outreach. Some longstanding attendees also serve as “ambassadors” who help newcomers feel welcome.

While the group has its regulars, participant Sheila Elliott says “there are also people like myself who attend most, but not all of the time, so there’s always someone





Older Adult Coffee Hour

First Fridays
9:30-11 am, Main Library
June 5 & August 7
(no July gathering)



Library Assistant Janet Lorch (left) and Older Adult Librarian Claire Steiner (right) organize the monthly coffee hour.

new to meet, or someone you met a month or two before and can check in with."

Conversation starters and activities are offered each month, but Sheila says the emphasis is on social interaction.

"It's the only group I've ever belonged to where we start by spending most of our time just talking with each other in a casual, informal way," she says. "That sort of informality leads to a very relaxed atmosphere, fun conversations, and a good time. I belong to quite a few other groups and have a lot of hobbies, but the Older Adult Coffee Hour is definitely the most easygoing of any of my interests, hands down."

Leah, who has been attending for about eight months, says it's "the diverse and intriguing gathering of mature people" that really draws her in.

"Each month people invite the group to join other activities in the community and talk about their personal work as writers, entertainers, activists, and volunteers," Leah says. "Believe me, this group is quite lively, and I certainly enjoy learning from them. Everyone has some knowledge, wisdom and humor to share. I am never let down or left out in this group."

More events for older adults

Chair Yoga
Tuesdays, 12:30–1 pm, virtual
More on page 8

Wednesday Movie Matinees
Wednesdays, 1–3 pm, Main Library

Scrabble Club
Tuesdays, 1 pm, Main Library
May 12, June 9, July 14, August 11

Weaving
Thursday, May 14, 9:30–11:30 am, Main Library

Tech Help Drop-In
Thursdays, 10 am–12 pm, Main Library
May 28, June 25, July 30, August 27

Parks & Pages: Read With Your Neighbors
Saturday, June 13, 11–1 pm, Scoville Park

Introduction to Chinese Mahjongg
Saturday, June 13, 10:30–12:30, Main Library

See **oppl.org/calendar** for more details about these events and sign up for our Older Adults email at **oppl.org/subscribe**.

Stitching science into art

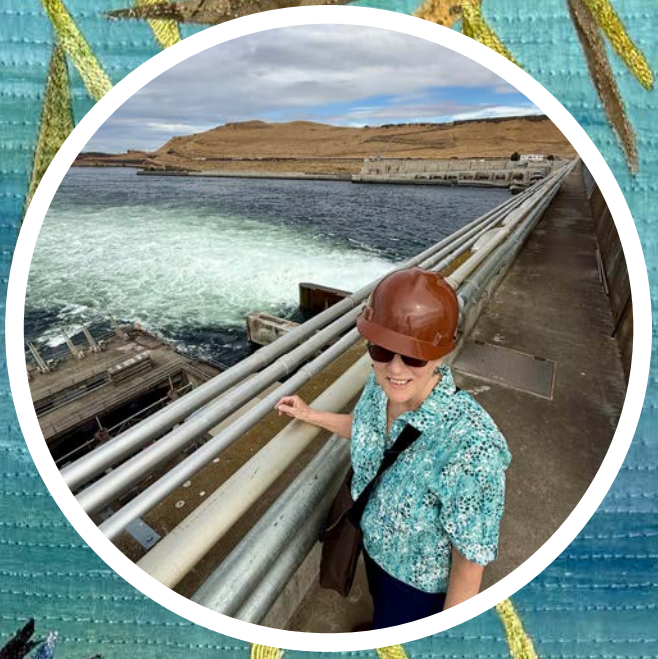


Photo above: *Local artist Lindsay Olson at the McNary Lock and Dam in Washington state, researching hydropower as the Pacific Northwest National Lab's resident artist. Lindsay's art practice is focused on regional and national water issues, and last year she was inspired to create a call for Illinois and Wisconsin members of Studio Arts Quilt Associates to create quilts celebrating the Mississippi Watershed.* RiverSong, *the resulting exhibit, is on display at the Main Library this May and June.*

Oak Park artist Lindsay Olson fell in love with science while learning about Cook County's wastewater treatment process.

"Like a lot of artists, I tried really hard to avoid science and math in my student days," Lindsay says.

But it was during a canoe trip on the Cal-Sag Channel in southwestern Cook County in 2012 that Lindsay got the idea to propose becoming the first visiting artist for the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District (MWRD). When the agency said yes, she went looking for artistic inspiration in the Stickney Water Reclamation Plant, a facility located at the geographic low spot of Cook County, where the wastewater treatment process begins.

And that's where she found herself, a textile artist and instructor at Columbia College Chicago, eagerly trying to understand how the MWRD turns our sewage into clean water.

At first she felt out of her depth, overwhelmed by all the valves and pipes, and assaulted by the loud noises of the pumps. "I thought, 'What have I gotten myself into?'"

The only thing to do, she decided, was to take out her sketchbook and sit. "Artists are trained to observe deeply, to think deeply," she says. And sure enough, she started to notice the order in the system—engineers had designed the system with color-coded pipes.

"All of a sudden I had a way in," she says, "through this shared experience of color."

As a textile artist, she interpreted the science of wastewater treatment through a body of embellished artworks. Using silk, linen, denim, and cotton, she stitched together colorful panels depicting bacteria and amoebas (the microbes that clean our water), aeration tanks, and even the trident of Poseidon, the mythic Greek god of the seas.

Flowing from this experience, Lindsay went on to become an artist in residence with other science and technology institutions, including the Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory and the Wetlands Initiative. She currently serves as the first artist in residence at the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory in Richland, Washington, where she's exploring the subject of hydropower.

Quilt on this page: "River Blues" by Pat Kroth
Quilt opposite: "Kingfisher in the Willow" by Pat Bishop

This May and June, a new textile exhibit that Lindsay curated will be on view in the Main Library Gallery. RiverSong is a collection of quilts by members of the Studio Art Quilt Association's Illinois and Wisconsin region. Each explores aspects of the Mississippi River Basin, the vast and intricate watershed that spans one-third of North America.

Some pieces portray life on the river, including American pelicans, a belted kingfisher, and all kinds of insects. Others center on personal stories—two clasped hands over the river where one quilter and her partner fell in love.





Left: "Dry Wells" by Lindsay Olson
Right: "A Span of Years" by Misty Cole

In addition to curating the exhibit, Lindsay has included a piece that highlights groundwater depletion in Illinois and its importance as both a source of drinking water and necessary to agriculture.

The exhibit, which has been traveling around the Midwest since last fall, made its debut at Downers Grove Public Library.

"Librarians in general have been so supportive of my work," Lindsay says. "Librarians help me advocate for the value of science and fine art in public spaces that are open to everyone."

RiverSong
On view: May 19–June 27
Reception & Gallery Talk:
June 4, 6:30 pm
Main Library Gallery
More: **oppl.org/art**

Chair Yoga: Free, gentle & accessible



"My goal has always been to make yoga more accessible for people and to teach in 'unconventional' spaces to help more people have access," says yoga instructor DuShaun Branch.

Every Tuesday afternoon, DuShaun offers a free virtual Chair Yoga class with the library.

"In library spaces, I often get people who have never done yoga or are returning after a long time, which is always exciting," DuShaun says. "Because of that, I really take my time explaining the practice [and] breaking down poses."

Participants tell us they enjoy DuShaun's gentle classes because they can do them from home, over the lunch hour, and with minimal equipment. And, as one participant told us, DuShaun "is very knowledgeable and always upbeat. She also feeds the soul."

Chair Yoga
Tuesdays, 12:30-1 pm, virtual
Sign up: **oppl.org/calendar**

DuShaun, who has been practicing yoga for 20 years and also teaches yoga at Forest Park Public Library, shares some thoughts about teaching yoga in libraries.

Why do you practice yoga?
It helps me connect with my breath and body, especially when times are very busy. Practicing yoga has been very helpful to me in a lot of hard times in my life, and I have been so grateful for the practice.

How would you describe your teaching approach?
The way I teach is trauma-informed, with the goal of making the class as accessible as possible. My classes are at a slower pace, where we focus on moving with intention and connecting to our breath.

How do you adapt your classes for everybody?
At the beginning of each class, I tell people to listen to their bodies and do what is best for them. In class, I often use language like "if it feels safe and accessible," and when we do standing poses, I offer options for what they can still do in their seats.

Why do you teach at libraries?
BECAUSE LIBRARIES ARE AMAZING!!!! The library is one of the last places that are open to all, and you get to meet so many different people. I have been teaching the Chair Yoga class virtually at Oak Park for about five years now, and even on Zoom, I have been able to connect with participants at all levels. Also, I have been so lucky to work with so many amazing people at the library for years and that just makes it easy and fun. I am a huge fan of libraries!



Yoga teacher DuShaun Branch (left) with virtual Chair Yoga students at the Main Library.

More health & wellness events

Grief Journaling
Sundays, 2 pm, Main Library
May 31, June 28, July 26

Soundbath Meditation
Wednesdays, Main Library
- May 27, 3 pm
- June 24, 6 pm
- July 29, 3 pm
- August 26, 3 pm

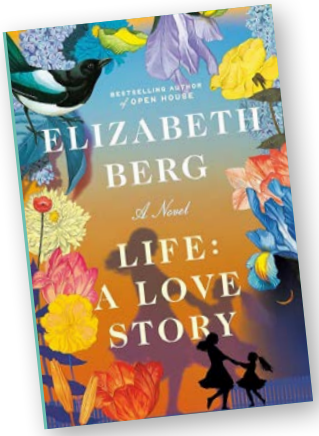
Breaking the Silence: A Conversation on Racial and Spiritual Trauma
Saturday, July 18, 11 am, Main Library

Neurodivergent Nerdout!
Sunday, July 19, 1 pm, Main Library

Hidden Disability Healing Circle
Sunday, July 26, 1 pm, Main Library

Join a book discussion

Do you like books and talking about them?
Check out our diverse mix of book groups that meet regularly at the Main Library, with discussion led by library staff members.



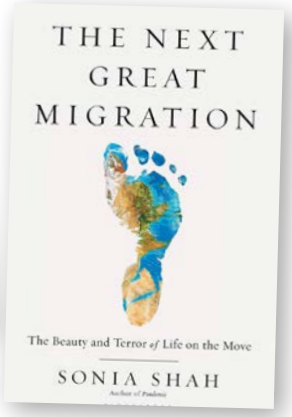
Words on Wednesday (our longest-running book group!) inspires conversation about a wide range of fiction and nonfiction.
Third Wednesdays, 1 pm
- May 20: *Life: A Love Story* by Elizabeth Berg
- June 17: *Empire of AI* by Karen Hao
- July 15: *The God of the Woods* by Liz Moore



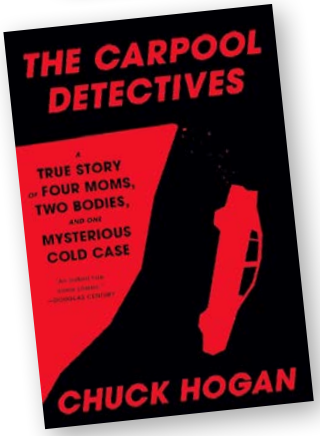
Otherworldly Reads alternates between science fiction and fantasy literature.
Bimonthly on Thursdays, 6 pm
- May 14: *The Empress of Salt and Fortune* and *When the Tiger Came Down the Mountain* by Nghi Vo
- July 9: *Old Man's War* by John Scalzi



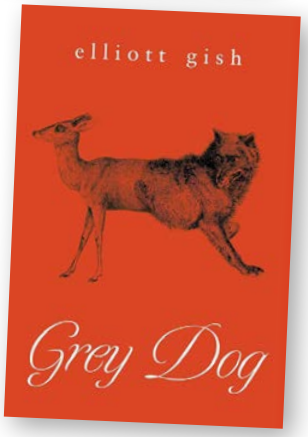
Latine Author Book Cafe discusses works written by Latine authors. Spanish-language copies available when possible.
Second Tuesdays, 6 pm
- May 12, 6 pm: *We Are Green and Trembling* by Gabriela Cabezón Cámara



Earth Lounge explores the curiosities and complexities of nature, environmentalism, and sustainability from a variety of perspectives across fiction and nonfiction.
Third Wednesdays, 6 pm
- May 20: *The Next Great Migration* by Sonia Shah
- June 7: *Troubled Waters* by Mary Annaïse Heglar
- July 15: Open discussion: Bring an article, book, podcast, video, website or film to share.
- August 19: *Hummingbird Salamander* by Jeff VanderMeer



Crime & Coffee talks history and crime with fellow true crime lovers over a hot cup of coffee. We explore cases through books, ebooks, audiobooks, true crime podcasts, documentaries, and more.
Bimonthly on Saturdays, 3:30 pm
- June 13: *The Carpool Detectives* by Chuck Hogan
- August 15: *The Stranger in the Woods* by Michael Finkel



Tea & Terror features exciting discussions of horror-themed books over hot tea. We read a variety of horror styles and subgenres—from the ghastly and gory to the spooky and sublime!
Bimonthly on Saturdays, 3:30 pm
- May 9: *Silver Nitrate* by Silvia Moreno-Garcia
- July 18: *Grey Dog* by Elliott Gish

Not pictured:
Paginas y Platicas reads books in Spanish and discusses them in Spanish.

Have your own book club?
- We can help you reserve multiple copies of a title for your book club.
- We also have Book Club Kits at the Main Library, which contain 10 copies of the same popular title for checkout by one Oak Park cardholder.
- If you're looking for ideas on what to read next, our librarians regularly curate lists of suggestions by genre and topic.

See all details and register: **oppl.org/book-groups**





Lights, Camera, Community:

In Lights, Camera, Community, a weekly after-school program at the Main Library, high school students have been learning the basics of video production and putting their new skills into practice. Earlier this year, students worked together to film, edit, and produce two videos that you can now watch on YouTube.

"They recorded the video, set up the equipment, and some were courageous enough to be on camera," says Programming Specialist James Turner (aka Mr. T). "Everyone has a story, a purpose, and here is proof."

In one video, students interview one another and library staff. A second video shares the story of the program itself.

Both are full of beautifully composed scenes showing how young people come to the library for social connection and belonging, participating in consistent activities run by trusted adults.

"What keeps me coming back to the library is making some friends, reading some books, and trying something new."
—Kiara

"I love the energy that teens bring," says Manager of Middle and High School Services (MHS) Latonia Jackson on camera. "I love the fact that they help me stay young. They kinda help me stay in the know with pop culture. And teens are so authentic, so real. I just like feeling like I have a part in shaping and molding them to be who they are right now, but then also to become who they desire to be."

The interactive Lights, Camera, Community program—which is now wrapping up for this school year but will return in the fall—is centered around storytelling, community, and self-advocacy.

"I would say the moment that made me most proud during the program was when I could just go set up the camera and set up the lighting and know what I was





‘Young people are our now’

actually doing,” said student Giovanni Uzokwe. “And helping the mentors set up everything. Because at the start of the program it was pretty hard to know what I was doing, but I think what made me really proud was just seeing that improvement that I made.”

Mr. T, who led the high schoolers along with Fred Brandstrader, a local artist and founder of A. New Variety, says the experience has been valuable to him as well.

“Just like I taught you guys about production,” James says on camera to a teen interviewer, “you taught me a lot about being a mentor, teaching, and just showing up as the best version of yourself that day.”

“A lot of people say young people are our future,” he adds. “No, young people are our now.”

Watch the video at **oppl.org/teens** or scan here

“What I love about the programs here is that they help us build connections and teach us more lessons on life and how to do things.” —Jayden

Summer at the Main Library

June 8–August 7

- MHS staff lead programs Monday through Thursday, 1–5 pm: Dungeons & Dragons, street art, DIY & self-growth.
- Log your summer reading & win prizes!

More for students in grades 6–12: **oppl.org/teens**

OAK PARK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Nonprofit
Organization
U.S. Postage PAID
Permit No. 134
Oak Park, IL

ECRWSS
POSTAL CUSTOMER

MAIN LIBRARY
834 Lake St. | 708.383.8200
Monday–Thursday: 9 am–9 pm
Friday: 9 am–6 pm
Saturday: 9 am–5 pm
Sunday: 12–5 pm

DOLE BRANCH
255 Augusta St. | 708.386.9032
Monday: Closed
Tuesday–Thursday: 10 am–9 pm
Friday: 10 am–6 pm
Saturday: 10 am–5 pm
Sunday: 12–5 pm

MAZE BRANCH
845 Gunderson Ave. | 708.386.4751
Monday–Thursday: 10 am–9 pm
Friday: Closed
Saturday: 10 am–5 pm
Sunday: 12–5 pm

CLOSINGS

All library buildings closed all day

- Monday, May 25
- Friday, June 19
- Saturday, July 4
- Monday, September 7

oppl.org/visit

SAVE THE DATE

Friends of the Library Book Fair
July 10–12, Main Library
Hours and details: **oppl.org/fair**



SUMMER READING FOR ADULTS & KIDS
June 1–August 31

KIDS (ages 2–11): Log your reading, complete fun activities and challenges, and win prizes! Sign up in person at any library location, or get started with the online platform Beanstack via **oppl.org/summer**.

ADULTS: Track your reading and complete activities for a chance to win an OPRF Chamber of Commerce gift card. Read your favorite books or ones we suggest, take Creativebug or LinkedIn Learning courses, visit the Creative Studio, and attend library events. Sign up with Beanstack via **oppl.org/summer**.