

I Love My  
Librarian!

**Nominations for Rae Anne Locke**  
Saugatuck Elementary “Secret Garden” Library  
Westport, Connecticut

**NOMINATOR**  
Melissa Augeri

- 1. Please tell us in 2-3 sentences why your nominee should win this award. What sets him/her apart?**

Rae Anne Locke is without question the Librarian of the Century! Since the inception of Saugatuck Elementary School (SES) in 2002, Rae Anne Locke has poured her heart and soul into planning, creating and growing the SES Secret Garden Library, a vibrant, warm and inviting place that is much more than a school library. It is truly the learning hub for our entire school community. With a collection of over 20,000 titles, the library is the place where everyone in the school wants to be, due to Rae Anne’s unique ability to cultivate meaningful relationships with students, staff and parents. It is through these relationships that she knows and “grows” her students -- matching each child to just the right books. Her innovative, “outside the box” thinking has greatly enhanced teachers’ work with students both in and out of their classrooms. Rae Anne’s collaborative projects have undoubtedly challenged students to meet our district goal to develop their 21st century skills. She has recruited and trained hundreds of inspired parent volunteers over the last ten years. A passionate leader, Rae Anne works tirelessly to create and share her vision for enhanced learning opportunities, and her work translates into meaningful achievement for all of her students.

- 2. How has the nominee helped you and/or students at school? For example, did the nominee help you with a project, recommend resources or collaborate with you to enhance student learning?**

“Over the last ten years, there is not a teacher at SES that Rae Anne has not collaborated with to enhance and extend students’ learning outcomes. Rae Anne’s knowledge of children’s literacy development, combined with great proficiency in current technology

helps teachers plan and implement meaningful, integrated learning projects,” states Barbara Beaman, Vice Principal at SES.

Rae Anne’s colleagues are always thrilled to work with her. Her enthusiasm and excitement are contagious! Even the simplest idea can become a masterpiece in the making after a conversation with Rae Anne. “While she is always a wonderful resource when we work together on student projects, she takes her role several steps further and becomes a team member on all projects with which she becomes involved,” shared Ken Hine, the SES Technology Teacher. “She is always able to present a fresh perspective on how to integrate print and digital resources into the learning process.”

The following examples highlight some of the many projects that Rae Anne has planned, shaped and been instrumental in bringing to life with the students and teachers at SES.

Rae Anne’s collaborative projects often reach out beyond the school community, such as when she collaborated with the second grade team to produce *The Kids Guide to Westport*. *The Kids Guide to Westport* is a magazine produced by second graders as they studied various communities in their social studies unit. Working under Rae Anne’s direction and in collaboration with the classroom teachers and technology teacher, students interviewed town leaders as part of their research. Next, the second graders worked with graphic design students from Westport’s Staples High School to produce and publish an informative and unique guide to the town. Thanks to Rae Anne students used various methods of research and teamwork while both learning about and contributing to their local community.

### Digital Book Trailers

In a project that motivated each and every 5th grade student, Rae Anne collaborated with members of the fifth grade teaching team to help students create digital book trailers. Students began by writing persuasive book reviews, and then from these reviews, wrote scripts for their book trailers. Following direct instruction provided by Rae Anne on photography and visual theme development, students selected their own visuals and music, determined the pacing of their trailers and storyboarded their projects. Next, using PhotoStory3, students inserted their visuals, including their self-created images, into their trailers to complete the project. Students delighted in sharing their thinking in such a compelling way with their peers during whole class presentations of their projects! The SES Secret Garden Library now has a computer station set up with these reviewed books, and the trailers can be easily accessed through the implementation of QR codes on the back of each book. Students in the whole school community can now view the book trailers on the library website by scanning these QR codes to easily access the trailers!

The digital book project was extremely unique because it helped motivate reluctant readers and writers. Reluctant readers and writers were able to shine because they were able to proudly share their story through their own photographs and music selections instead of the traditional, written book review. Her strong relationships and intimate

knowledge of each of the 5th grade students helped to guide them from the book selection process to the digital posting.

“Rae Anne put in a lot of work into the digital book project. It was beyond what she needed to do,” said 5th grade teacher, Kristin Gerner. “With the help of Rae Anne, they turned out fantastic and through her individual work with each student, every student achieved success.”

### The Saugatuck Seal News – Town Meeting

In addition to these ongoing grade level projects, Rae Anne collaborates with the technology teacher to produce the Saugatuck Seal News (SSN) – a monthly, digital school news program. It is one of the most talked about and celebrated events in the SES community. Students, parents and teachers wait at the edge of their seats each month in anticipation of the SES Town Meeting and the feature presentation, the SSN. This twenty minute video newsletter regularly features student book reviews, teacher and student interviews, curriculum highlights and school spirit events. Rae Anne works closely with teachers and students to help showcase their work, and the entire school community absolutely loves coming together to watch SSN on the big screen! Parents join in the auditorium as students learn, laugh, cheer and soak in the school spirit.

Through her individual, grade level and whole school collaboration, Rae Anne has helped every member of the school community learn in a more interesting and meaningful way. Additionally, Rae Anne is always looking for ways to help students share their learning with others, and her innovative and creative ideas assist her in accomplishing this goal!

### **3. How does the nominee make the school a better place? Please be specific.**

Rae Anne makes SES a better place because she works tirelessly to make her Secret Garden Library an inviting, stimulating learning center where humor is used daily. Never does a class visit and enjoy without a funny exchange or a warm moment. “Ever since I stepped in this library in Kindergarten, I could tell there was something special here,” shared 5th grade student Annabelle W. “It’s magical AND Mrs. Locke loves books like I do!”

Rae Anne’s library is the heart and the ‘hub-bub’ of the school. It’s a place where students and parents go as a retreat and refuge to escape the day-to-day chaos because she has created an atmosphere where everyone feels comfortable and special. Her interesting projects, innovation and creativity has captivated so many students over the years that parent volunteers flock to the library each year to help Rae Anne maintain a model, multimedia environment that is accessible to all students at any time throughout the day. By attracting, training and retaining a regular group of volunteers, Rae Anne has been able to implement an ‘open door policy’. This guarantees that students from all grade levels can visit the library outside of their regularly scheduled time to do research and select additional titles for independent reading. The volunteer program and the fact that families like to donate things the library needs, in support of Rae Anne, makes her program more impervious to any budget cuts. Tracy George, a parent volunteer explains

why Rae Anne attracts so many volunteers. “The thing that stands out about Rae Anne and the library, for me, is the warmth and intimacy,” states Tracy.

In fact, the SES Secret Garden Library was selected and showcased as a model library during the Rabbit Hill Literature Festival this past year. Children’s literature professionals toured the SES Library during the three day affair for teachers, parents, aspiring authors and illustrators in the Northeast region including Connecticut, New York and Massachusetts.

A sign in the SES Secret Garden Library reads “Be a Researcher, a Learner, a Reader.” Not all of the students start out enjoying researching, learning or reading equally. However, Rae Anne never gives up! She leads by example and actively participates in utilizing unique resources, learning new ways to improve her practice and of course, she is constantly reading to select and offer the latest and most interesting titles to all of her favorite students. 5th grade student, Roxanne A. added, “I wouldn’t trust anyone else to help me when I need books or a website. I love her so much. She isn’t your regular SHHHH! librarian. She listens and doesn’t even mind if you talk.”

It’s extremely important to note that all of the 560 students at SES enter the library feeling like one of her favorite students. The reason they feel this way is very obvious to everyone who is lucky enough meet her. She takes the time to genuinely get to know and appreciate each and every student. She embraces and challenges their strengths while inspiring them to overcome things they find more difficult. Somehow, she accomplishes all of this without the students feeling any pressure. She is passionate about reaching every student in an individual way – encouraging and transforming reluctant readers and satiating the appetites of the most ravenous readers.

According to 2nd grade teacher Davia Phillips, “Rae Anne takes the time to learn about students’ interests and has a great capacity for remembering little details about their lives that subsequently influences the books they choose.”

There are several other initiatives that Rae Anne has put into place at SES to improve the quality of life for her students and their families. Through the Rise and Read Program, Rae Anne invites a different grade level, once a month, to the SES Secret Garden before school hours to bring a parent or family member and enjoy a book together. Through this program, students can share their favorite books and involve their parents in their research. It allows parents, especially working parents, to spend quality time with their child before they start their day. Rae Anne welcomes each family, gets to know them, recommends books to share and suggests resources for their topics of interest.

Colleagues, students and parents all recognize how Rae Anne enhances SES. “There are many libraries in the world; countless others in school buildings,” explains Andrea Ojeda, a library volunteer. “They are not as privileged to have this captain, this dreamer, this creative power that is our librarian, Mrs. Locke.”

**4. How has the library, and the nominee in particular, had an impact on students and the learning process?**

Rae Anne has had a profound impact on students and the learning process in a variety of ways. By working so closely and cooperatively with her fellow educators, she is able to create rich, memorable learning experiences. By connecting with students in such a personal way, she has inspired life long readers and inquisitive researchers. The impact she has made becomes immeasurable when considering the positive influence she has had on the thousands of children who have had the privilege of being her student.

The following examples demonstrate how Rae Anne has made a lasting impression on so many students.

**Transforming Readers**

“In second grade, I wasn’t an inspired reader, but Mrs. Locke always gave me great book recommendations and it started this love of reading of mine,” explains David B., a 6th grade student who now attends the middle school. “She influenced my life with books. She is also a great teacher and has taught me so much. I will never forget her teaching us the different parts of the SES website in 2nd grade, and the book project we did last year was really cool, smart and techie.”

“Mrs. Locke is different from all the other people who have tried to get me to read, even my Mom. She didn’t stop trying to find books that I like. Even when I kept saying no, she never got mad and she never gave up,” shares 3rd grade, Nick A. “She even invited me to a book club this summer to help show me that reading was fun. She emailed clues and puzzles to find the meeting place, and it was cool to check the email for the messages. I think it finally worked because she really cares and now I even like to read. My teacher even told me that I went up in my reading level over the summer, which is important.”

**Developing Critical Thinking Skills and Nurturing Independent Researchers**

Rae Anne is a leader through instruction and by example of the collaborative model of learning at SES. “Whether the project is large or small, Rae Anne makes the research gathering and synthesis engaging and motivational to students,” explains Ken Hine, Rae Anne’s SES colleague. “Her goal always seems to be to bring the questioning to a higher level and to push the students to think more critically. “

Rae Anne has co-designed lessons with the ITL, district department chair to teach elementary students how to ask good questions – the hierarchy of questions needed for higher order thinking. This includes “fact questions” and “thinking questions”. By constantly improving her own teaching practice, she improves the learning process at SES. She inspires her colleagues to improve their instruction by modeling self-reflection. In fact, she spends as much time examining her own teaching as she would in preparing for it.

All grades, K-5, have relevant, integrated research experiences throughout the year that are tailored to compliment the curriculum and students interests. They include using books, databases, websites, Skype and narrative non-fiction titles. They often have a 'big think' component to stimulate conversation among students.

Rae Anne also works closely with students in the Gifted Program at SES to enhance their learning and challenge their conventional wisdom. As the students ponder their topics for independent research, Rae Anne guides them in conversation and the use of traditional and more progressive, technology-based methods. She is continuously looking for new and creative ways to engage children in the research process. Longtime volunteer Andrea Ojeda comments about Rae Anne's unique approach with each student researcher. "It is quite impressive, actually, how often she renews herself and her projects, so that each year the students find new interests and different approaches to topics that, otherwise, would become stale."

### Visiting Authors

Each year, SES welcomes children's authors for a visit. Rae Anne is instrumental in bringing current authors to SES to discuss literature, the writing process, editing and the life of an author with the students at various grade levels. These visits, led by Rae Anne, are very meaningful for the students as they learn about the experiences and inspirations of the individual authors. Author visits also include book signings and an interesting subject for student interviews. Student reporters are selected to interview the visiting authors and report for the Saugatuck Seal News program.

### Learning Can Be Fun

Finally, Rae Anne captures the attention of the students with various traditions she started at SES. She dresses as a book character for Halloween and the school is a buzz the day trying to guess who she will arrive as, in the morning. Each year, Rae Anne coordinates a Read Across America celebration for Dr. Seuss's birthday. Inviting book displays and distributing Scaredy Squirrel to the student body to travel with and document their summer journey are just a few of many more ways that Rae Anne demonstrates that learning can be fun.

## **5. How has the individual demonstrated leadership in the school community?**

Rae Anne is an icon in the school community and an exceptional role model. She leads by example and her work in the community has made a real difference in the lives of her students and those they help.

"The first day I met Rae Anne, I was struck by her friendliness, candor and big smile. Here was a person who was truly and absolutely in love with her profession. The way she spoke to us about her vision for the SES Library and how it would bring people together...I will never forget," shares Andrea Ojeda, library volunteer.

Simply stated, Rae Anne truly cares about helping others. She works to share this passion with all of her students and colleagues. The following examples demonstrate her commitment to being an outstanding leader in the school community.

#### Wetsport 2025 and Professional Committees

Rae Anne has been instrumental in implementing 21st century skills as part of a long-range curriculum initiative launched last year - Westport 2025. The initiative seeks to develop local students' critical thinking, collaborative and problem solving skills. She serves on the district ITL and Cohort 2, a school-based committee which examines teaching skills needed for the global future. She works diligently each day to incorporate these new ideas and practices into her curriculum. Through teaching professional development, she is always anxious to share her knowledge and collaborate with her colleagues. She has taught workshops for teachers and administrators on new children's literature, Google Earth, Discovery Education and Google Apps.

Rae Anne has also been the district's faculty representative for the Rabbit Hill Festival of Literature Committee - sponsored by the Westport Public Library. She attends professional literature and technology workshops all year long and whenever she returns from her annual trip to the National Book Festival in D.C., she is bursting with excitement to share new authors and titles with the students and teachers.

#### Caring Council

Rae Anne is the creator and leader of the SES Caring Council; a student committee that works to benefit local, charitable organizations and current causes. Through community outreach, Rae Anne helps Caring Council members identify organizations and neighboring schools that need support; in hopes to make a big impact in the community. Under Rae Anne's guidance, the Caring Council students educate the entire student body and their families about where help is needed most.

The Caring Council members benefit from the experience as much as the people they are working to help and support.

Caring Council announces a new initiative each month and past initiatives have included coat drives, toy drives, school supply donations, book drives, animal humanity, costume donations and recycling education.

Rae Anne also assisted in spearheading the first SES Walk-a-Thon to benefit the victims of Hurricane Katrina and since then, the Caring Council researches and meets to select a current, worthy cause. These have included raising money for the victims of the earthquakes in Haiti and Japan and the Tsunami. Rae Anne works closely with the Save the Children organization as a resource for ways other schools can be involved in helping the community. Save the Children is the leading independent organization that helps communities rebuild when disaster strikes.

## The Parent Volunteer Community

Volunteering in Rae Anne's Secret Garden Library is such a privilege. She has created and leads a community of parents who volunteer to support Rae Anne because they know that her Secret Garden Library make the school a better place for their children. The spirit of the library volunteer group is obvious when Rae Anne invites the volunteers to the annual Secret Garden luncheon. Ironically, Rae Anne hosts the luncheon to reach out personally and thank individual volunteers for their contributions. It is the volunteers who should be thanking her for creating a school experience that the children will always remember. The volunteers often wonder how many more students love reading and learning because of Rae Anne.

At the last Secret Garden luncheon, Maureen Lynch offered the following words in her tribute to Rae Anne. "I have often thought of how wonderful Rae Anne makes me feel and then I realize that in fact, I am not her audience at all. Rather, our children are the reasons that she goes to work every day. Oh, and how lucky they are."

Kate Klise, award winning children's author describes Rae Anne as a "rare gem among jewels. She has a way of finding the right book for the right child, almost like a seasoned chef. She nurtures struggling readers and nudges more ambitious readers. You can feel the energy as soon as you walk in her library."

Rae Anne Locke's unrelenting commitment to being the best person, colleague, role model and educator she can possibly be make her the ideal candidate for Librarian of the Year.

I Love My Librarian!

**NOMINATOR**

Ramin Ganeshram

- 1. Please tell us in 2-3 sentences why your nominee should win this award. What sets him/her apart?**

Mrs. Locke never ceases to amaze in the way she remembers each child, their reading preference, and is ever ready with suggestions to help them read more and love books. She makes the school library a "preferred stop" in the children's day.

- 2. How has the nominee helped you and/or students at school? For example, did the nominee help you with a project, recommend resources or collaborate with you to enhance student learning?**

When my book "Stir It Up!" came out last year, I suggested to Mrs. Locke that maybe it would interesting for me to come chat with students in an informal way. She quickly organized for me to chat with some classes when they came in for the book fair--and took initiative to provide handout of recipes in the book for kids. She has been an invaluable resource to me as I have researched new children's book projects.

- 3. How does the nominee make the school a better place? Please be specific.**

Mrs. Locke is incredibly interested in diversity and uses the library resources to share a multiplicity of cultures and traditions by tying in material to the ethnic and cultural backgrounds of those in the student body. We live in a community that is not very diverse and her efforts help broaden the children's minds in a way that might not otherwise be possible organically through socialization.

**4. How has the library, and the nominee in particular, had an impact on students and the learning process?**

Mrs. Locke encourages the students not only to read but showcases their book reviews--thereby empowering their own ideas and thought processes.

**5. How has the individual demonstrated leadership in the school community?**

Mrs. Locke has created a "Books for Parents" section of the school library website that provides useful information on common and uncommon child development issues. This is just an extension of her willingness to tailor library studies to each child's individual needs as part of a holistic approach to create a generation of readers.