

## FAIR Launches with a Jingle Jangle

By Tiffany Lyman-Olszewski



John Porcino  
and FAIR Participants

The words that storyteller John Porcino used to frame our discussion—“when we talk, there are no right or wrong answers... everyone’s voice is important”—settled in as a recent session of Family Adventures in Reading (FAIR) began. I was immersed in a group of families of many ethnicities, whose members ranged from six to sixty years old, or more. They had come

to this humanities-based family reading program at the Central Library in Springfield on a cold Saturday, to be nourished by thoughtful discussion and warmed by John’s exciting presentation.

This was the fourth of six weekly FAIR sessions, and most children had already attended at least one—they all clearly were eager to be there. The group included seventeen children and ten parents and caregivers, each of whom enthusiastically offered input and asked questions at one point or another. In this session, the books included *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak; *Lon Po Po* by Ed Young; and *Abiyoyo* by Pete Seeger. Mass Humanities will be presenting FAIR in Springfield through the coming spring, underwritten entirely with a generous grant from The Edith Glick Shoolman Children’s Foundation.

John embraces the joy and adventure in life, and conveys that to the children with apparent effortlessness. He has cultivated his engaging and interactive style of story-

telling for over twenty years, beginning on a cross-country journey when he was in his twenties. His ground rules make clear the open-minded way he approaches storytelling, and the kids are unmistakably receptive to it.

As he started into Sendak’s famous imaginary adventures of a boy named Max, John explained that this was the first story he ever told to a group of children, at a small school near the Mississippi River. He interspersed personal anecdotes while telling the story, encouraged the kids to speak about what they read, and role-played the characters. At the end of the story, John asked questions such as “Why do people like monsters so much?” One teen responded by saying, “they’re interesting, scary and mysterious,” while a younger child said, “because it helps us to see scary things not in real life; but it’s good to see them in books, on TV and in movies.”

After a guitar interlude of “All Life’s Critters Got a Place in the Choir,” a song that builds a sense of community, John showed the group an *erhu*, a musical instrument his mother had brought him from China. This led directly into *Lon Po Po*, a Chinese version of “Little Red Riding Hood” where siblings use teamwork to foil an evil wolf. At the end, John asked both children and adults to describe a time when they had to solve a problem.

During a brief refreshment break, a member of the library staff announced upcoming programs and classes at the library, and John spoke of other books the kids could borrow.

The final book with musical accompaniment was *Abiyoyo*, based on a South African lullaby about a father and son who use their bravery, wits and a ukulele to rid their community of an irksome

### Nominations Sought

Mass Humanities is actively seeking nominations of qualified individuals to serve on its board of directors. Candidates must live or work in Massachusetts and believe in the importance of the humanities and their relevance to contemporary life.

In addition to professionals in fields related to the humanities, the board consists of members with expertise in program evaluation, community organizing, marketing, finance, law, fundraising, and many other areas.

If you would like to nominate someone, or are interested yourself, please visit this page of our Web site: <http://www.masshumanities.org/?p=nominations>, where you will find more information and a description of board member responsibilities.

## Recent Grants

■ LJA: Funded through the Mass Humanities initiative, Liberty and Justice for All ▼ CED: Awarded through the thematic initiative, Cultural Economic Development

For application procedures and deadlines, visit [www.masshumanities.org](http://www.masshumanities.org).

### Greater Boston

\$4,555 to the American Islamic Congress for *The Boston Muslim Film Festival*, on the theme of “Express Art,” which examines artistic expression in the face of censorship in the Muslim world.

\$5,000 to Calliope Film Resources, Inc. of Lexington to convert *A Little Rebellion Now and Then*, a Mass Humanities-commissioned video about Shays’ Rebellion, into a DVD for use in classrooms.

\$10,000 to the Center for Independent Documentary of Sharon for a trailer and script of *The Draft and Democracy*, a film about the history of conscription in the United States. ■ LJA

\$1,500 to the Center for Independent Documentary of Sharon for *The Pixapedia Immigration Project*, a series of short, Web-based films designed for immigrants seeking United States citizenship. ■ LJA

\$10,000 to the Center for Independent Documentary of Sharon for a film trailer and treatment of *Struggle Baby*, about children of radicals coping with the legacies of growing up in activist households. ■ LJA

\$5,000 to Interfaith, Inc. of Sharon for *One Town, Many Cultures*, a four-part film and scholar-led discussion series at the Sharon Public Library.

\$3,750 to the Newton Historical Society for *The Jacksons and Their Homestead*, an exhibit to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the building of the Jackson Homestead, where the Newton History Museum is located.

\$3,415 to Revels, Inc. of Watertown for *An American Journey: Revels Repertory Company School Program and Public Performances* to support seven presentations of musical theater dramatizing the experiences of early-twentieth-century immigrants to the United States.

### Northeast

\$5,000 to the Cultural Organization of Lowell for the 2009 Lowell Film Festival, which will center on the impact of globalization on the garment industry and worldwide food production and distribution. ▼ CED

\$10,000 to the Gloucester Maritime Heritage Center for the *Working Waterfront Interpretive Program* to accompany the exhibit, *Fitting Out*, dedicated to the skills, trades and crafts involved in the Gloucester fisheries circa 1900. ▼ CED

\$5,000 to Light of Cambodian Children, Inc. of Lowell for *The Cambodian Refugee Poetry Book & CD Project* to support the translation of Khmer poems by refugee Ly Van Aggadipo.

\$9,070 to the The Sargent-Murray-Gilman-Hough House Association of Gloucester for *Reinterpreting the Sargent House: Judith Sargent Murray and the Struggle for Female Rights* in support of a re-visioning process. ■ LJA

### Southeast and Cape Cod

\$5,000 to the Aquinnah Cultural Center for *Oral Histories of Aquinnah*, a permanent exhibit featuring oral histories of Wampanoag elders taped during the past twenty years. ■ LJA

\$5,000 to the Fuller Craft Museum of Brockton for *Craft in America* to support exhibit-based family resource guides, teacher resource packets and supplies for family-oriented workshops in conjunction with the *Craft in America* exhibit. ▼ CED

### Western

\$4,090 to Five Colleges, Inc. of Amherst to support *Great Decisions*, a five-part lecture series about American foreign policy issues, to be organized by Five Colleges Learning in Retirement. ■ LJA

\$9,650 to Paper Town Projects, Inc. of Stockbridge for pre-production of a documentary chronicling the history and demise of the 200-year old papermaking industry in Lee, Massachusetts.

\$10,000 to Springfield Technical Community College for *Taking History Home: Shays’ Rebellion Interactive Exhibit*, to install state-of-the-art pedestal kiosks in Springfield museums. ■ LJA and ▼ CED

\$10,000 to Straight Ahead Pictures of Conway to recreate part of the Disability History Museum Web site ([www.disabilitymuseum.org](http://www.disabilitymuseum.org)). ■ LJA

\$5,000 to the Wistariahurst Museum of Holyoke for *Holyoke’s Memory Book*, to support the collection and online distribution of oral-history interviews with Holyoke’s elderly residents.

### Other

\$5,000 to University Press of New England in Lebanon, N.H. toward publication of *The Colonial Meetinghouses of New England*, a book of photographs by Paul Wainwright with accompanying essays.

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Mass Humanities promotes the use of history, literature, philosophy, and the other humanities disciplines to deepen our understanding of the issues of the day, strengthen our sense of common purpose, and enrich individual and community life. We take the humanities out of the classroom and into the community.

Mass Humanities, a private, nonprofit, educational organization, receives funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities; the Massachusetts Cultural Council, a state agency; and private sources.



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giant. John invited the children to demonstrate parts of the book as he read. When the time was up, John asked the children to think about bravery, and talk with the adults at home about what it means to be brave.



I was impressed with John’s skill as a storyteller, the group of children and adults who turned out to take part in FAIR, and the organized library staff. As one child said very simply, “We talk about stories because they help you to learn.” And FAIR is doing just that—helping both children and adults to read, share and grow together in a fun, non-judgmental environment.

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## Massachusetts Cultural Council Commonwealth Reading Series

In partnership with Mass Humanities, the MCC will spotlight local fellows and finalists from its Artist Fellowship Program in a series of free local gatherings, statewide. Every two years, the MCC awards grants to talented Massachusetts writers, who have included Robert Pinsky, Sue Miller, Tom Perrotta, and many others. Come hear this year’s fellows and finalists read their work. The first readings will take place at Forbes Library at 20 West Street in downtown Northampton, February 25th at 7:00 pm. For more information, contact Dan Blask at (617) 727-3668, ext. 329.

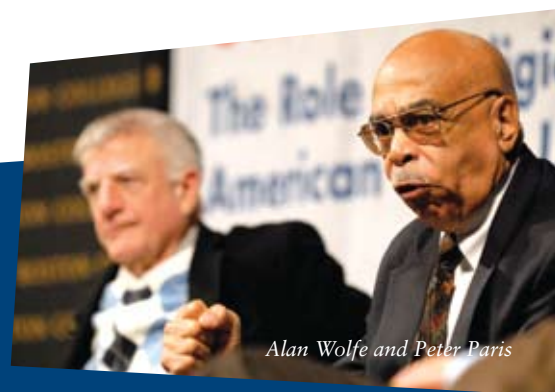


## One Nation Under God?

The Role of Religion in American Public Life

### The Annual Mass Humanities Fall Symposium

Your parents may have told you to avoid talking about religion and politics in public, but almost 300 people did just that on November 22, when they participated in our symposium, hosted by Boston College. The program brought a stellar group of academics, journalists, theologians and other thought leaders together with students and members of the general public. The full account by Kathryn Ruth Bloom is posted on our blog, *The Public Humanist*, which you can access through the Mass Humanities home page at [www.masshumanities.org](http://www.masshumanities.org).



Alan Wolfe and Peter Paris

*I drove 70 miles each way to attend and was so very gratified that it was worth every minute.*

—S.B., Warren, MA





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## The Clemente Course Needs Your Help!



Recent cuts in state funding—made after our Clemente students had enrolled in September—have left us with a gap of \$100,000 in the program’s budget. Through Clemente, we provide adults in or near poverty with introductory courses in the humanities, free of charge, for college credit. Help us bring the humanities to those who could use them most in these tough times, by making a tax-deductible contribution today. You can read more about Clemente at our Web site, [www.masshumanities.org](http://www.masshumanities.org). Please make a donation now by clicking the Donate tab at the top of the home page.

*Members of the 2008 Clemente graduating class in Boston*