

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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2022
ANNUAL REPORT

JOIN THE DISCUSSION



JOIN THE **MHC**

We connect...people with books,
communities with ideas, and
strangers with one another.

The **Maine Humanities Council** is a statewide non-profit organization that uses books, poetry, and big ideas to bring people together to discuss issues of importance. We're a program partner, grantmaker, and connector of people and communities. Our connections strengthen our society and help shape the future of Maine. As Maine's affiliate of the **National Endowment for the Humanities** (NEH), we offer humanities programs and grants for all Mainers.

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HARRIET P. HENRY CENTER FOR THE BOOK

The Maine Humanities Council is home to the Harriet P. Henry Center for the Book, Maine's affiliate for the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress. The Library of Congress Center for the Book was established in 1977 to promote books, reading, libraries, and literacy. In 1997 the Maine Humanities Council established the Maine Center for the Book as a state affiliate of that program. It was renamed the Harriet P. Henry Center for the Book in 2003, in honor of Maine's first female judge, a former Board chair of MHC and a longtime supporter of the humanities.

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As I move towards my first full year of leadership at Maine Humanities, I am reflecting on the ways that our offerings have shifted to more accurately reflect the diverse and expansive ways that Mainers engage with the humanities. Internally, this shift has been a slow and intentional process, as staff have both broadened and deepened our outreach throughout the state and have worked to forge new collaborative partnerships with organizations.

Seeing the external manifestation of these shifts has been one of the joys in my work. I work very closely with our Grants Team and have been watching interest in our Mini and Major grants grow in interesting ways. We've worked hard to enhance our grant informational sessions and to invite all organizations—not just humanities-based organizations—to think creatively about how the humanities can enhance the work that they're doing, regardless of what sector they're situated in. Increased interest has meant more applicants to our grant programs and more grant awardees who are new to Maine Humanities. Our program partners are growing in similar ways. In the past year, roughly 1/3 of our programming partners have been working with us for the first time. It is heartening to see so many organizations and community-based groups turning towards the humanities to help them deepen their connections and understandings of each other during these tumultuous times.

Finally, our focus on Afrofuturism has strengthened connections and has allowed us to engage new audiences curious about the genre and its history. As we continue diving into new ways of being and imagining different paths forward through Afrofuturism, we are finding that the resonance of our work is rippling out wider across the state. We are seeing new audiences at our events—audiences from all walks of life eager to engage with the questions and ideas that Afrofuturism presents because they are the questions and ideas that they've been grappling with themselves. We're also finding that this focus has allowed us to grow closer with partners like Indigo Arts Alliance and Bowdoin College who share our belief about the importance and significance of Afrofuturism as a genre.

This expanding and diversifying is exciting to us. I invite you to continue reading this publication to learn more about the ways we've been growing this past year.



Samaa Abdurraqib
Executive Director

Photo: Sampson Spadafore



OPENING UP DISCUSSION

So many possibilities can open up in a book discussion. At Literacy Volunteers of Franklin and Somerset Counties (LVFSC), a Discussion Project built around the theme of Disability Visibility, History, and Justice was one way to make space for people to talk about important things that come out of people's lived experience, and to build the context that enables people to see themselves as part of the unfolding of history, right here, right now.

BOOKS

We Move Together by Kelly Fritsch and Anne McGuire, illustrated by Eduardo Trejos | *Show Me A Sign* by Anne Clare LeZotte | *El Deafo* by Cece Bell | *What if all people were valued and respected? Part 2*, MHC Big Question video with Maine Developmental Disabilities Council | *Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution* directed by Nicole Newnham and Jim LeBrecht.

FACILITATOR

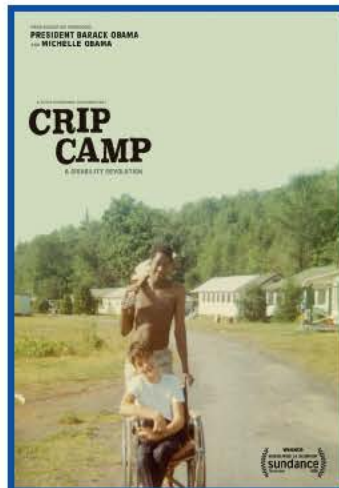
MHC Facilitator Sara Beech was the lead facilitator, bringing together five small group classrooms.

HOST

The dynamic staff at Literacy Volunteers of Franklin and Somerset Counties worked together on this project to hold a complex Discussion Project that supported participants so that they could engage fully with texts in formats new to their discussions – graphic novels, film – and that stretched their reading level in innovative, empowering ways.

PARTICIPANTS

Folks Zoomed in from home, restaurants, and three public libraries across three counties and two school districts. A total of 43 people attended, with an average of 19 people in each class.



CRIP CAMP

The award-winning documentary directed by Nicole Newnham and Jim LeBrecht grounded LVFSC discussions on disability visibility, history, and justice.

"Our community has been meeting for years, and we carry themes and memories from each discussion into each new one. It is wonderful to have folks who are very comfortable reading aloud, discussing, and asking questions model for new folks who might not feel comfortable yet."

- Sara Beech, MHC Facilitator

LVFSC Book Discussion team (left to right): Sara Beech (staff), Elizabeth Cooke (volunteer), Matilda Holt (board member and participant), Barbara Averill (staff). Photo: LVFSC.



OVER 60 MAINE LIBRARIES

read Phuc Tran's *Sigh, Gone* and Meredith Hall's *Beneficence*

For the sixth summer in a row, libraries across the state participated in Read ME, our statewide community read offered in partnership with Maine State Library. From its beginning, Read ME has worked to highlight the breadth and depth of people both writing and reading books in Maine. In 2022, recommending author Christina Baker Kline selected Phuc Tran's *Sigh, Gone* and Meredith Hall's *Beneficence*—offering both a memoir and a novel to serve as a foundation for library discussion groups, author talks, a special episode of Maine Calling for readers to call in to, and more.

For 2023, recommending author Colin Woodard has selected *Night of the Living Rez* by Morgan Talty and *Lungfish* by Meghan Gilliss. Also new in 2023, MHC and Maine State Library have joined up with Maine Writers & Publishers Alliance to make Read ME even better—we're thrilled to deepen our relationship with the vibrant community of Maine writers through this partnership.

Year after year, Read ME draws people's attention to the vibrance of Maine, to the people who write and read books here, and to each other.



Read ME 2022 authors Phuc Tran (photo: Jeff Roberts) and Meredith Hall (photo: Nick Brown)

"Read ME is so easy to implement at our library. The MHC provides eye-catching promotional materials and the program offers a number of ways for our patrons to participate."

Melissa Small
Readfield Community Library

Photo: Stacy Tran



"I didn't expect to feel so empowered to express myself...this was a safe and nurturing place to work through my feelings."

- Poetry Express Performer

SHARING POEMS TO EXPLORE WHAT'S IMPORTANT

Poetry and performance are a catalyst for engaging with things that matter. That's what we learned from the five, very distinct Poetry Express programs in 2022. From Fort Kent to Portland, poets, performers, and audiences gathered to share their work, the work of others, and dig into issues and themes important to their communities.

Southern Maine Workers Center with Sass Borodkin

Could have gone all night sharing, discussing, and engaging with poems

University of Maine at Fort Kent with Valerie Lawson

Opened up conversation and connection around history and place

Paradise Found LLC at Jesup Memorial Library with Claire Millikin

Listening with care lead to vulnerable, honest discussion across generations

Maine Women's Correctional Center with Signature Mimi

Music, poetry, and participants inspired to share their writing for the first time.

MaineTransNet with Maya Williams

Made space for trans people to explore what peace and gender euphoria means to them.

THE BIG QUESTION

What if we go on this way?

Our annual Big Question program was an evening of noticing, learning, and discussion focused on the question *What if we go on this way?* Together with guides from the innovative communities of Lewiston and Auburn, we considered what the question means in the systems of education, justice, and housing. The event was an opportunity to look closely at what we are doing, notice the consequences, and envision possible paths forward.

"We have to consider what spaces and places schools consider normal and what places and people we're excluding."

- AYESHA HALL, Lewiston Public Schools

What if we go on teaching and learning this way?



"When we ask this question together, I think we'll find more meaningful and restorative pathways when it comes to issues of crime and punishment in our communities."

- CUBA JACKSON, Maine Prisoner Advocacy Coalition

What if we go on punishing people this way?



"We're often lead to think of the home as simply a personal preference, but it actually massively organizes our lives, politics, and economics in profound ways."

- CRAIG SADDLEMIRE, Raise-OP Housing

What if we go on treating homes this way?



GRANTS

Over \$96,000 in support to Maine nonprofits and communities

23 towns represented statewide

16 grantees awarded an MHC grant for the first time

MHC GRANTS support projects that encourage a deeper understanding of ourselves and one another, build lasting connections, and reach diverse, multigenerational, and rural audiences.

FEATURED GRANTEES

MINI GRANT - \$1,000

**Brick Store Museum:
Museum School Learning Partnership**

This Kennebunk museum’s installation of a ‘Travelling Exhibit Case’ in a local elementary school, with an activity booklet for kids that they could complete and trade in at the museum for free family-group admission and a prize—an age-appropriate book published by one of Maine’s own publishers—offered support to educators and a spark for young students. They hope to expand this simple, successful project over the years to come.



MAJOR GRANT - \$2,314

**University of Maine at Fort Kent:
Voices of the Borderland: The Social Impact of
International Travel Restrictions in Northern Maine**

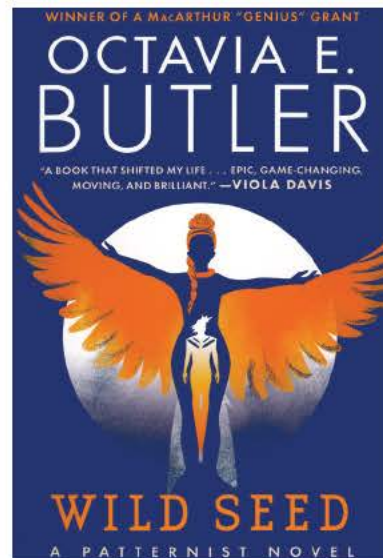
The Acadian Archives at the University of Maine at Fort Kent, conducted a series of heartbreaking and inspiring interviews that record the challenges faced by northern Maine residents and the resilience they mustered in the last three years. This project contributes to the Archives’ ongoing aim of creating spaces to preserve and elevate the voices of Franco-Americans and Acadians of the Upper St. John River Valley.



READERS RETREAT

"I've been a fan of Octavia Butler for years...I'm so glad new audiences and new generations are getting this opportunity to explore her work."

- First-time Readers Retreat Participant



Octavia E. Butler's *Wild Seed* was the featured book at Readers Retreat 2022, sparking our multi-year engagement with the genres of Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism.



Readers Retreat 2022 was both a culminating event and a leaping off point. Before registration opened for our deep dive into Octavia E. Butler's *Wild Seed*, over 300 copies of the book were already being used by more than 25 MHC reading and discussion groups across the state. The day was an invitation for people to continue their discussions on the novel, start new ones with others both familiar with and new to the work of Octavia Butler, and join us as we officially began our multi-year exploration of Afrofuturism.

A literary scholar, an archivist, and a multimedia artist shared their thoughts on the novel's connections to pop culture, mythology, art, and more, offering readers a variety of ways to engage with Butler's timeless novel. Participants attended both in-person and online, submitted Octavia Butler-themed artwork, joined in small-group facilitated discussions, and more.

We continue our exploration of Afrofuturism in May with Rivers Solomon's *An Unkindness of Ghosts*.

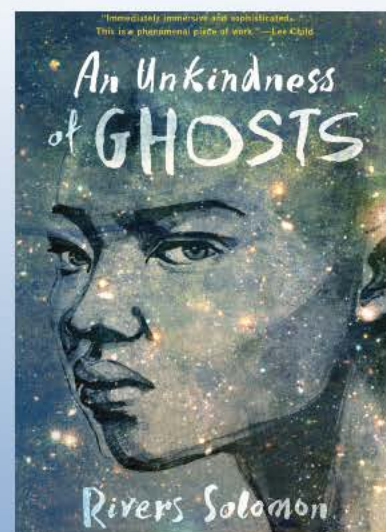
Above: Winning *Wild Seed* map by Alexis Draut. Leading up to Readers Retreat 2022, participants submitted maps and notebooks with art inspired by their reading of the novel.



Readers Retreat 2023 *AN UNKINDNESS OF GHOSTS*

This gripping sci-fi novel gives a vivid microcosm of our moment's pressing political and social inequities.

Rivers Solomon, author of *An Unkindness of Ghosts*, will be the keynote speaker for Readers Retreat 2023 on May 20 at Southern Maine Community College. Learn more and register at mainehumanities.org



FINANCIAL PARTNERSHIPS

The Maine Humanities Council is deeply grateful for every gift that supports our programming. The people listed below made these gifts between 11/1/2021 and 10/31/2022, a challenging year for our state, this nation, and the world. To these donors: You are important partners, ensuring that other partners—people from nonprofits that hold MHC programs, and facilitators and speakers that lead MHC programs—can do this work. Together, we are all making a difference in Maine, as the stories in this report share. Thank you for your partnership.

Online: mainehumanities.org

A monthly gift: only \$15 each month results in a \$180 total gift; \$50 per month gives \$600 by the year's end; and \$85 ends up being a generous \$1,020.

MHC Book Fund: Putting books into people's hands all across Maine.

A qualified charitable distribution through your IRA, or gift of stock.

ANNUAL GIVING – FISCAL YEAR 2022

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William H. Laubenstein III
Thomas and Leslie Lizotte
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in honor of my mother, Pamela S.
Lord on her 80th birthday

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Sally and Ted Oldham
Steven Passerman, in loving memory
of Harriet Passerman
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Julie Sheehan
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Carol and Joe Wishcamper

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Douglas M. and Laura A. Henry
in memory of Harriet P. Henry on what
would have been her 99th birthday

\$100 - \$249
(continued)

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Peggy Mower
Margaret R. Muir
Dave Musser and Valerie Sherman
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Jean Potuchek
Jane and Jim Pringle

THE STATE OF OUR STORY

2022

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Benjamin Soule
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in memory of Dr. Bruce Cole
Mary Vekasi
Nancy Ziegler and Kermit Lipez

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and Wendy Allen
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Shannon Webster
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**MAINE
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COUNCIL**

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Center for the Book

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