APLS staff speak to the delegates of the Alabama Governor’s Youth Leadership Forum, a unique week-long learning opportunity for Alabama’s high school juniors and seniors with disabilities. See related story on next page.
APLS Reference Librarian Alex Perry and BPH Reader Advisor Tim Emmons met with Alabama high school juniors and seniors with disabilities taking part in leadership activities and learning how state government works at the Alabama Governor’s Youth Leadership Forum (YLF).

On June 6, APLS staff participated in YLF’s technology expo, which aims to explain to delegates the critical role assistive technology plays in the daily lives of persons with disabilities. While there, staff also promoted APLS’ online educational and tutoring resources including Homework Alabama and the Learning Express Library.

YLF is a 5-day camp for students with disabilities to help them develop leadership and independent living skills, and is a program of the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services with additional assistance provided by the Alabama Department of Mental Health, the Alabama Council on Developmental Disabilities and Troy University.

Survey data now available

Fiscal year 2017 Public Library Survey (PLS) data is now available. To access this data, go to http://collectconnect.baker-taylor.com/ and use the same login information you use for Bibliostat Collect.

Public libraries work hard to compile statistics each year for the PLS, so why not use that information to your advantage? You can use this data to see trends, create goals, and better plan for the future. The data can help you keep your board, elected officials, funders, and community informed about what the library is doing. To request a customized spreadsheet, ask questions, or get more information, please contact Stephanie Taylor at 334-213-3943 or staylor@apls.state.al.us.
The Word is Murder
written by Anthony Horowitz
Release Date: June 5, 2018 (previously released in the U.K.)

Review by Heather Cover, Homewood Public Library

This fictional mystery, written in nonfiction true crime style, will have readers boggled until the very last page.

International bestselling author Anthony Horowitz is approached by ex-Detective Inspector Daniel Hawthorne, formerly of the Metropolitan Police, with a proposition. Hawthorne, now a private consultant, is a bit strapped for cash (“There just aren’t enough people getting murdered.”) and wants Horowitz to follow him around and write a book about him, splitting the profit fifty-fifty. He even has the title picked out: Hawthorne Investigates. Horowitz has just finished his newest novel, House of Silk, and is at somewhat of a loose end, so he agrees.

Hawthorne has just started a new case: Diana Cowper, a healthy woman in her sixties, spent the afternoon at Cornwallis and Sons Funeral Parlor arranging her funeral. Six hours later she was murdered in her home. As Horowitz follows Hawthorne around, the reader becomes familiar with the case and the suspects. However, Hawthorne himself, the supposed focus of the novel, remains inscrutable. The reader—and Horowitz—know little of Hawthorne’s life, his history, or even his reasoning for the direction he takes the investigation. The reader must rely instead on Horowitz’s account. Fortunately, Horowitz is observant, records conversations, and takes detailed notes. Buried in these notes, in all of the information relayed through interviews and research, is the identity of Diana Cowper’s murderer. Who will realize it first, Hawthorne or Horowitz…or the murderer?

In Horowitz’s 2016 novel, The Magpie Murders, Horowitz played with the framework of the mystery story, writing a novel within a novel. The Word is Murder is a fictional novel, but within its pages Horowitz has muddled the line between fiction and nonfiction, weaving factual information about his own life and career into the fictional investigation that he and (mostly) Hawthorne conducts. The character development is also unusual. Hawthorne is a private, secreted individual, which frustrates Horowitz and makes it difficult for the reader to get a handle on him. He’s fleshed out almost against his will. The narrator is Horowitz, and sometimes it almost feels as if he’s written a memoir instead of a murder mystery. But ultimately the main character is the mystery itself, with the actual victim and the people Hawthorne interviews mere secondary characters—interesting and realistic—but only there to move the plot along instead of engaging the reader.

The plot of The Word is Murder is more cerebral than action-oriented, and the blur of fiction and reality is somewhat mind-bending. This initially made it difficult to fully immerse myself in the story. Once I stopped trying to decipher what I thought was true versus what the author likely made up I enjoyed the story much more. The pacing of the novel was good and it kept my attention.

Recommended for: The Word is Murder is a very different detective novel. Readers who enjoy murder mysteries and detective stories will likely gobble it up. It will help to be somewhat familiar with Anthony Horowitz, but it isn’t necessary for overall enjoyment of the book.

Things to note: There is one mildly graphic description of a dead body, but readers who enjoy murder mysteries have likely read worse.
The Bertha Pleasant Williams at Rosa L. Parks Ave. Branch of Montgomery City-County Public Library recently held its first “Hero Like Me” art competition to coincide with the release of Marvel’s Black Panther movie.

This branch serves a predominantly minority community, and the staff envisioned the contest as a way to empower children and youth patrons by giving them an opportunity to see themselves as heroes. The competition, which was open to students from pre-K to grade 12, was a part of a larger celebration in honor of Black History Month. Winners received a custom-printed poster with the drawing of their hero, and also have their artwork prominently displayed in library’s meeting room.

The community responded positively to the art competition. It was also enthusiastically supported by E. D. Nixon Elementary staff and students.

Library staff were pleased with the quality of submissions and expect even greater participation in the years to come.

‘Hero Like Me’ winner: Cassidy R., Age 8

‘Hero Like Me’ winner: Joseph G., Age 14

‘Hero Like Me’ winner: Michael-Christopher R., Age 10
Birmingham’s Central Library kicks off summer learning opportunities

On June 1, downtown Birmingham’s Central Library held a summer kickoff event, featuring carnival-style games, food, and live music by George Griffin & the Firebirds.

The Birmingham Public Library (BPL) will have more than 400 free programs for children, teens, and adults throughout the summer to deepen reading enjoyment and spark STEAM interests.

One of the first of many STEAM opportunities at BPL included the Teen Engineer Robotics Camp, which ran from June 4-8. Twenty teenagers with engineering interests learned about programming robots and gained computer coding skills in the week-long camp, which was made possible in part from contributions from the Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham, the UAB Benevolent Fund, and the Alabama Power Foundation.

Winfield Public Library thanks firefighters, talks about community workers

On May 4, staff from Winfield Public Library delivered gift baskets to every full-time and volunteer firefighter with the Winfield Fire Department.

“We wanted to show them how much we appreciate them for ensuring our community and environment’s safety,” said WPL Library Assistant Emily Allison. “We also dedicated five books with bookplates in honor of WFD and its volunteers.”

Similarly, first grade students from Winfield Elementary recently visited the library to learn more about local heroes like police officers or firefighters as part of a field trip for Community Workers Day.

The first graders toured the library and learned about its programs and services, and Allison read aloud “Luna Loves Library Day” by Joseph Coelho and Fiona Lunbers. The children enjoyed the story and asked questions about the library throughout their visit.
Woodville Library opens summer reading with aquarium expert visit

Tennessee Aquarium Education Outreach Coordinator Bill Haley presented Woodville Public Library’s first program in their summer reading series on June 6. Haley led a hands-on discussion about different animals that are native to Alabama. Ninety-seven children attending the event were also able to touch the animals.

Right, Bill Haley, education outreach coordinator with the Tennessee Aquarium holds a turtle while demonstrating its natural defense mechanism