

# LIBRARIAN SPOTLIGHT:

## Driving Engagement, Writing, and Critical Thinking in the Library

# Monica Alaniz

Library Media Specialist



**School:**  
Cody Elementary School



**Location:**  
San Antonio, Texas



**District:**  
Northside Independent School District



**Grades Served:**  
PreK–5

### The Challenge

At Cody Elementary School, students visit the library once a week for just 30 minutes—making every minute of instruction count.

For librarian Monica Alaniz, that meant balancing multiple priorities:

- ⦿ Keeping students **engaged during limited time**
- ⦿ Supporting **classroom learning across subjects**
- ⦿ Building **research, reading, and media literacy skills**
- ⦿ Reinforcing **district-wide initiatives**, including short constructed responses (SCRs)



“I’m constantly looking for ways to keep students in the library engaged—which gets more challenging each year.”

### The Solution

Monica integrates News-O-Matic into her weekly library instruction to bring **relevant, real-world nonfiction** into every lesson.

She intentionally aligns articles to:

- ⦿ **Classroom topics and curriculum goals**
- ⦿ **District writing priorities**, especially SCRs
- ⦿ **Grade-level skill development**, from early literacy to argumentation



“I try to connect what students are learning in the classroom with library resources... which often include News-O-Matic.”

Using daily, leveled articles and built-in supports like Active Learning slides, Monica creates lessons where all students can access the same content—while working at their individual reading level.

## Supporting District Initiatives: Writing with Purpose

Northside ISD is focused on strengthening students' ability to write **short constructed responses (SCRs)**—and Monica uses News-O-Matic as a natural way to reinforce this.



**“News-O-Matic is a perfect resource for students practicing SCRs.”**

In practice, this looks like:

- ⦿ Students reading a shared article
- ⦿ Responding to **discussion questions** from the Active Learning slides
- ⦿ Practicing how to **cite evidence**, organize ideas, and write clearly about informational text

**This allows Monica to directly support classroom teachers while giving students consistent, low-pressure writing practice in the library.**

## Bringing Learning to Life: Real Article Examples

Monica also uses specific articles to build **critical thinking and argumentation skills**, especially with older students.

Two student-favorite examples include:

In practice, this looks like:

### Real Jobs! Christmas Tree Farmer

- ⦿ Students explored environmental trade-offs between **real vs. artificial trees**
- ⦿ They discussed sustainability and formed evidence-based opinions
- ⦿ Many were surprised by the environmental benefits of real trees

### The Dire Wolf Returns!

- ⦿ Students examined the idea of **bringing extinct animals back to life**
- ⦿ They debated ethical and scientific questions
- ⦿ Discussions pushed students to **analyze pros and cons and justify their thinking**



**“They loved discovering the reasons behind real-world issues and debating what scientists should or shouldn’t do.”**

## The Results



### Higher student engagement

Students are excited to read and discuss current events. **“They love that it’s about what’s happening in the world today.”**



### Improved critical thinking and argumentation

Students analyze real-world topics, evaluate perspectives, and defend their ideas.



### Stronger writing skills aligned to district goals

Regular SCR practice builds confidence in responding to informational text.



### Cross-curricular connections

Articles reinforce science, social studies, and literacy in one cohesive experience.

## Engaging All Learners

News-O-Matic’s built-in supports help Monica reach every student:

- ⦿ Adjustable **Lexile levels** so all students can read the same topic
- ⦿ **Read-to-Me audio** for developing readers
- ⦿ **Videos and maps** to deepen understanding



**“My students love the videos and maps that come with each article.”**

She often uses slideshow images as a **visual hook** to spark curiosity at the start of each lesson.

## Teaching Media Literacy and Trustworthy News

In an age of constant information, Monica values having a source students can trust.

Using News-O-Matic, students learn to:

- ⦿ Recognize **reliable information**
- ⦿ Build **media literacy skills**
- ⦿ Become more thoughtful, informed readers



**“It’s important for students to know what’s real and factual and what’s not.”**

## A Memorable Moment

One standout project involved a **“spooky places” research unit** around Halloween.

### Students:

- ⦿ Explored different locations using News-O-Matic articles
- ⦿ Chose a place to research further
- ⦿ Shared their findings with classmates



**“As students researched... you could hear a pin drop! They even asked if we could do more projects like this.”**

## The Impact

**For Monica,  
the value is clear:**



**“Students are learning new things with News-O-Matic—things they didn’t know before. I absolutely love using it in our school library.”**



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