



# THE ART OF THE REFERENCE INTERVIEW

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*Sonia Gavin, 2013 LRL PDS*

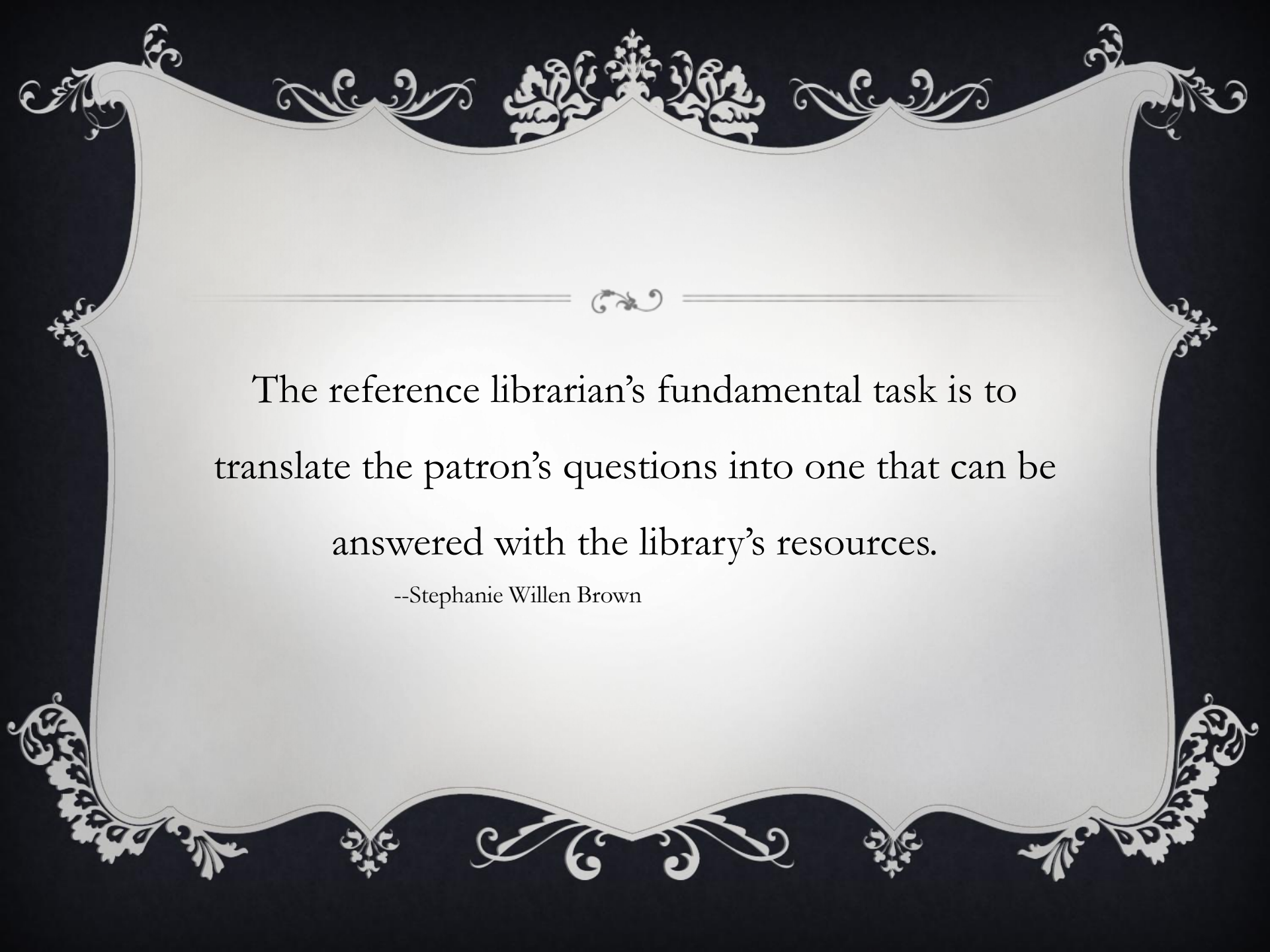


# CAN BIRDS FLY?

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❖ From YouTube:

❖ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rb0DR96FDn0>



The reference librarian's fundamental task is to  
translate the patron's questions into one that can be  
answered with the library's resources.

--Stephanie Willen Brown

A decorative border with intricate scrollwork and floral patterns surrounds the text. The border is white and set against a dark background.

# FROM THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF BOSTON:

❖ Five main areas are:

- Approachability
- Interest
- Listening/Inquiring
- Searching
- Follow up



# APPROACHABILITY

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- ❖ Body language
- ❖ Have a smile and eye contact
  - A handshake and a first name let the patron know they have your full attention
- ❖ Greet the patron as they approach your desk
- ❖ Let them know they have your full attention

# INTEREST

- ❖ Asking about the patron's research topic can be important
  - A business person researching tax code
  - A pro se litigant writing a parenting plan
  - Middle school student learning about your state
- ❖ Restate and rephrase the question
- ❖ Do not assume you know where the question is going



# LISTENING/INQUIRING

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- ❖ Nod your head
- ❖ Ask clarifying statements
- ❖ Ask open questions to gain more information
- ❖ Again, make eye contact!



# SEARCHING

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- ❖ Direct the patron to the most appropriate resources
- ❖ Be mindful of terminology.
  - Divorce versus dissolution of marriage
- ❖ Familiarize yourself with the topic
  - Google
  - Wikipedia





# FOLLOW UP

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- ❖ Check on the patron if they are looking in the stacks or researching online
- ❖ If I have conducted the research, I will contact the patron a day or so later to see if the information was useful and appropriate



# DEADLINE

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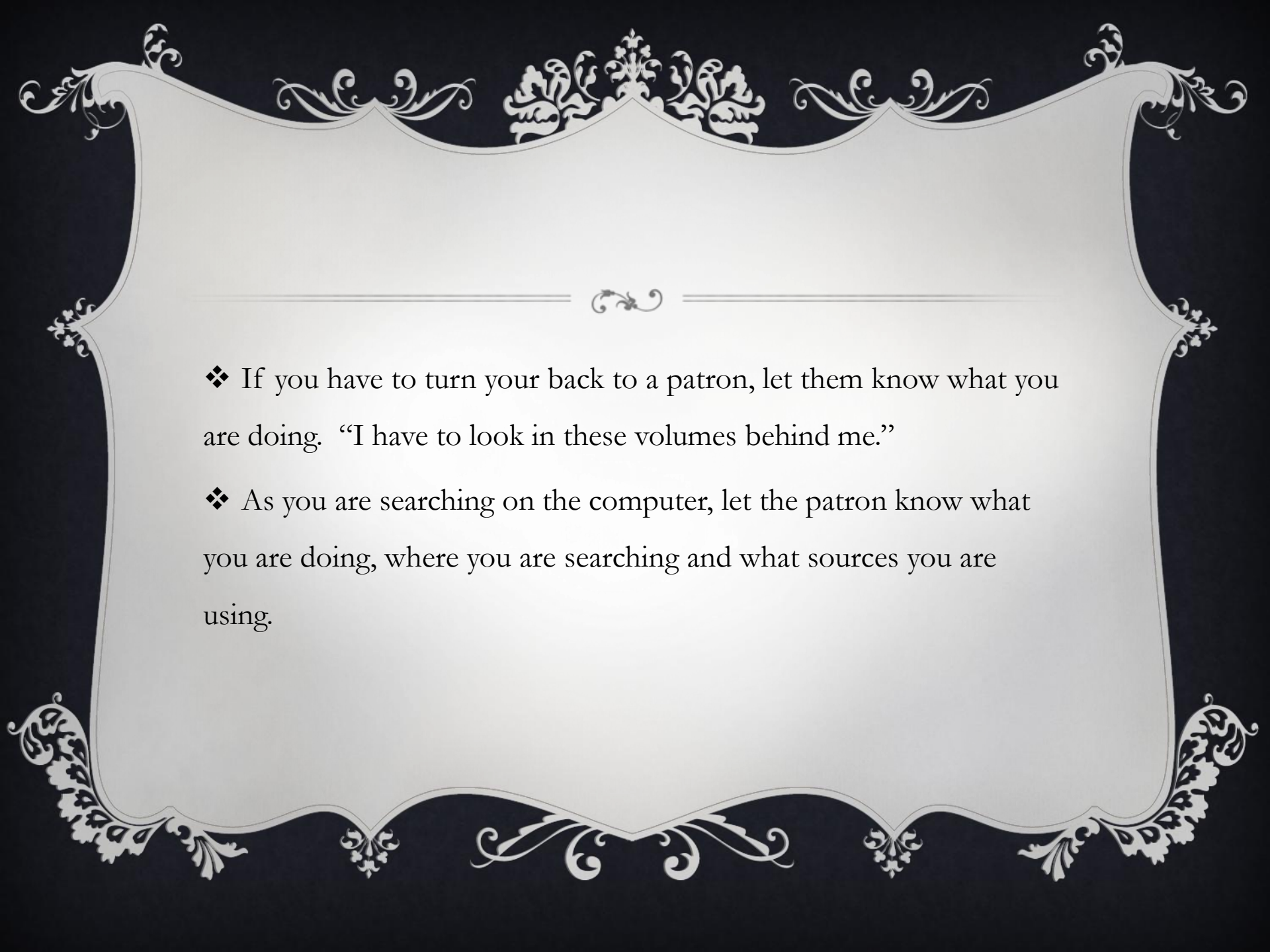
- ❖ Always ask when they need the information!



# KNOW YOUR PATRON

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- ❖ Legislators have certain expectations
- ❖ Provide both sides of an issue
- ❖ Prioritize your requests

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- ❖ If you have to turn your back to a patron, let them know what you are doing. “I have to look in these volumes behind me.”
  - ❖ As you are searching on the computer, let the patron know what you are doing, where you are searching and what sources you are using.



# TEACHABLE MOMENTS

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- ❖ Be prepared to teach along the way
  - Draw pictures, diagrams, or write out steps on how to drill down through a website

# ONLINE INTERACTIONS

❖ Make sure your online reference link is working and has accurate information

- Another state agency library had a standard e-mail stating that an answer would be sent within a week. Really???
- Make sure the link works
- Always be timely with your response
- Use a salutation and signature line when responding which makes online chatting and reference more personable



Mary Whisner's Article  
*Teaching the Art of the Reference Interview*

Assistant Librarian for Reference  
Marian Gould Gallagher Law Library  
University of Washington



# BE APPROACHABLE

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❖ Yes, I repeat this

- I think that phone number will be in a directory. Here, let me see
- Can I help you find something?
- Would you like a little help with our catalog?





# OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

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- ❖ Can you tell me more about what you are looking for?
- ❖ Could you be more specific about \_\_\_\_\_?
- ❖ What sort of material are you hoping to find?



# FOCUS THE QUESTION

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- ❖ Do you think the statute was federal or state?
- ❖ Do you know what state that was in?
- ❖ How recent do you think the case was?



# VERIFY

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- ❖ You're looking for some books and articles about school funding, is that right?
- ❖ You'd like to find out about the gun control statutes in Montana and California, correct?



# RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

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❖ For a question like yours, it's a good idea to start out looking for recent periodicals. If you find a good article, the author will give you an overview and cite cases that you can then look up.



# AVOID JARGON

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- ❖ The Montana Codes Annotated versus the MCA
  - Let's go out to the Montana Code Annotated – it contains the statutes that the legislature passed, arranged by subject
- ❖ Be aware of library jargon as well
  - Full-text
  - Ebsco
  - Classified



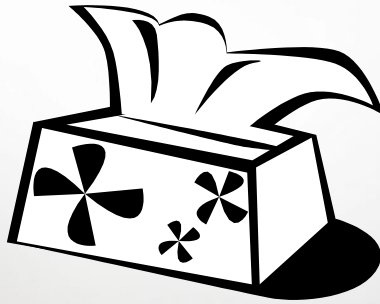
# FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS

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- ❖ Are you finding what you need?
- ❖ Was that source helpful?

# LIFE IS MESSY

- ❖ Have Kleenex and hand sanitizer readily available





# LOS ANGELES LAW LIBRARY

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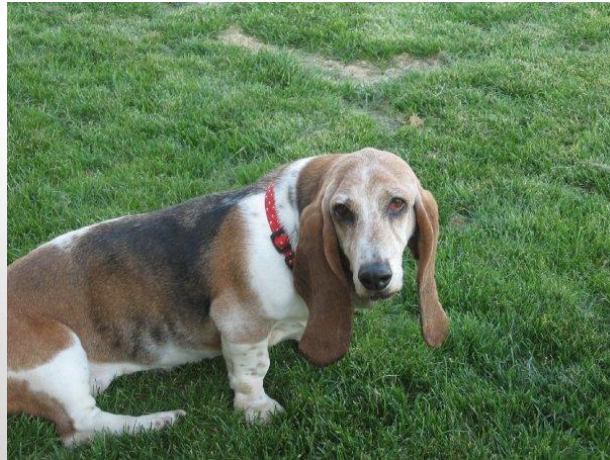
❖ You Tube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YM50FMUPXJg>



# HAPPY BIRTHDAY

To Millie, my now fourteen-year-old Basset Hound!





# DISCUSSION

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- ❖ Questions?
- ❖ Stories to share?