can make their own flannel boards and stage puppet plays.

Sierra and Kaminski strongly recommend the use of flannel boards and puppets: "Through the use of puppets and flannel boards, storytellers can better keep children's attention and help them develop their ability to concentrate."

They also comment that flannel boards can be used with students learning English and older and mixed-age groups.

In addition to providing twenty-five stories for public and school librarians to use in storytelling, Sierra and Kaminski have compiled resource lists of multicultural folktales, in picture book format and collections, and indexes and bibliographic sources for folktales from different cultures.

Sierra and Kaminski present their material in a very enthusiastic and encouraging style. The 8 1/2" by 11" workbook-style format is easy to use. Public and school librarians who are looking for multicultural collections of folktales should consider adding this book to their professional shelves. Librarians should be aware, however, that this book has a how-to orientation and does not go into detail about the importance of multiculturalism. Also, while Sierra and Kaminski have included a wide spectrum of stories from different countries and areas of origin, there are some omissions — Native American, Arab, and Jewish stories, for instance.

Anne Pellowski and Margaret Read MacDonald both have wonderful collections of folktales that involve audience participation and use objects, music, and visual devices. Sierra and Kaminski's *Multicultural Folktales*, as well as their other titles, complement the work of Pellowski and MacDonald.

**READER'S FORUM:**

**LIBERATION TECHNOLOGY**

by Al Kagan

In the August 7, 1991 PLG mailing, members were asked to submit short informal comments on the pros and cons of using new information technologies (on-line, CD-ROMs, fax machines, electronic mail, etc.) in regard to advancing a progressive agenda. We were asked to address whether this technology can be used to promote social change, or whether the technology carries with it intrinsic counter political implications. Furthermore, will computer technology in libraries challenge the democratizing influence of print culture?

I will argue that information technology has already been used to promote social change, that it can be a democratizing influence, and that it also carries intrinsic political implications. Furthermore, information technology is here whether we like it or not. We cannot reverse history, so we might as well use what we have for the best purpose. Those with political power are sure to use every means, including electronic, at their disposal. We would be in error not to do the same to advance a progressive agenda.

Let us look at some examples. The leaders of the recent Chinese democracy movement used fax machines to communicate with each other and connect with allies in other countries. Although the movement was suppressed, Chinese society was shaken, and technology helped shake it. During the attempted coup in the Soviet Union, most of the media was shut down, but electronic mail filled part of the void. The new Soviet electronic network, GlasNet, was so overloaded with messages, that the network managers had to ask that frivolous messages from foreigners (like us) be curtailed. The African National Congress of South Africa used computers and CD-ROM technology to help train its students in exile at the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom School in Tanzania. This was training for empowerment to help create a future democratic South Africa. The Pan American Health Organization has cre-
ated a CD-ROM with several databases for use in the promotion of health in Latin America and the Caribbean. It is interesting that the software supports the use of four languages.

In another context here at home, libraries are buying CD-ROMs to take the place of expensive mediated on-line searching. I have the personal experience of seeing the democratization of database searching at my own workplace. It is no longer for the few who can afford to pay, but for everyone who walks into our library.

The Left’s problems with new technology come from a number of sources. Information is certainly potential power, and advanced information technology has definitely helped to build nuclear weapons, stealth bombers, and polluting factories of all kinds. In short, information technology has been used against us for death instead of life. But information is also potential power for us.

We may feel that capitalist society values technology for itself as an end, instead of as a means. But when we look closely we find that high tech engineers are highly paid because they make large profits for their employers. Whether they are building weapons or video recorders, they have a direct effect on the bottom line of the corporations and the rich and powerful owners for whom they work. However, it does not then follow that we should reject technology because it is used as a capitalist profit-making tool. Instead, we should investigate how we can use what is available for our own purposes.

Outdated political notions also make us weary of new technology. Statism (and sometimes even Stalinism) influences the Left against using information technology. Progressives supported the Russian and Chinese revolutions to better the quality of life for millions of people. Many wanted to believe that democracy would be intermixed with material advancements, such as universal health care, literacy, and a reasonable level of nutrition. Many thought that a powerful state and vanguard party were necessary to reorient society. However, we did not always admit that freedom of expression and democratic values were often lost in the process. We now know that the Soviets did not make personal computers, fax machines, or even copy machines and typewriters generally available because they feared the effects of the free flow of information. But many may still wonder how a just society can be created without strong centralized direction. We know that capitalism can overwhelm progressive efforts, and we are unsure of how to come to grips with this problem. Nevertheless, we do believe in access to information for all. We must develop new ways of defining “democracy” and “socialism” in order to create both a more free and more just society.

The Chinese and the Russian people now look to the ideals in our Bill of Rights for inspiration, not to the poverty and homelessness of a large proportion of the American citizenry. The promise of these ideals has served to energize democratic movements. At the same time, the export of our economic system is also beginning to cause homelessness in St. Petersburg and Moscow. It is clear that we must somehow create a social system that guarantees both human rights and economic security.

Advanced information technology does imply political consequences. It provides the opportunity for individuals to more easily communicate with each other and to access more and more varied information. As the technology becomes widespread, it results in the more free and extensive flow of information. It is our job to promote free and easy access to the technology, and to make sure that our views are well represented. We should be thinking about the distribution of technology in order to influence the distribution of wealth.

CD-ROM technology can be appropriate for poor countries and poor libraries. It does not rely on a national telephone or electricity grid, and the cost of computer hardware and CD-ROMs is decreasing at a dramatic rate. But technology will never be a panacea, and there are some basic practical problems. Computer technology changes quickly, and today’s hardware and software will be obsolete tomorrow. Large First World libraries can budget to replace equipment as necessary, but Third World libraries will likely have to use their equipment for more extended periods of time. How will libraries in poor countries develop the expertise to keep the equipment running, day to day and over long periods of time? How will they get access to parts and service? How will extreme climatic conditions...
effect the equipment? For example, is CD-ROM technology useful in a tropical climate without the use of air conditioning? Careful planning will be necessary to prevent disasters.

We must lessen the gap between the information rich and the information poor — between countries and within nations. Electronic technology can be an appropriate equalizing factor, or a tool of the rich. If we withdraw from or try to ignore electronic means, we will loose the opportunity to use these very powerful tools for progressive ends.

A RESPONSE
by John Buschman

Having read Al Kagan's essay, I am torn by two conflicting responses. The first is to applaud his determination to grab hold of these new resources and make them sources of democratic and critical resistance. My second response is to cringe at his acceptance of information technology as tabula rasa on which we are (relatively) free to write our own script.

I have argued elsewhere that librarianship is uncritically accepting information technology resources to the detriment of long-standing professional values (Reference Librarian, issue 31 and American Libraries, December 1990). Furthermore, there is a large body of critical literature which tells us that any technology is not neutral: it comes from a social, political, and economic context which is built right into the structure of that technology right from the start. In the case of information technologies, John Durham Peters notes that the origins of information theory, the programs to create / manipulate information, and the development of the hardware were products of the Cold War military (Journal of Communication Inquiry, 12 (2), 1988). Information technology resources, like television or nuclear power plants, have a "hidden curriculum" or, if you prefer, a "subtext" that must be identified.

Librarians have, for a long time now, blithely overlooked just these kinds of issues. Herbert Schiller has documented the corporate context and influence of information production (see his Culture Inc., 1989 and essay with Anita Schiller in The Politics of Information, 1982). We are not yet seriously grappling with the issue of just how these new resources are affecting what we collect as John Haar suggests (Reference Librarian, issue 22.) The next step will bring us even more of the same electronic texts and perhaps we will "collect" electronic books. Eugene Provenzo (in Literacy Online, 1992) and Peters have both suggested that the archiving of the "real" record and the "original text" may be irrelevant. Further, the ability to truly change, edit, censor that text without traces of the original suggest real and serious difficulties with the library's mission of providing both a