

# The New York Public Library Insta Novels

Jay Chiat Awards 2019 |  
Connection Strategy

## Summary

# Once upon a time, there was a public library in New York City

It was a special place, with high ceilings and beautiful bookshelves—a place where people went to be inspired, to pass the time, to discover something new, and above all, to fall in love with stories.

### **But soon they stopped.**

Existing readers went to the library less and less. Gen Z didn't even bother starting. They ignored their books and picked up their phones, dazzled by their glowing screens as they scrolled and swiped.

People worried—in the face of these new distractions, how would the New York Public Library continue to help young people fall in love with reading?

But one scrappy team had an idea. More than an idea, a philosophy: solutions are hiding everywhere, even inside the “problem” itself.

This is the story of how the New York Public Library turned social media from an enemy into an ally, and in doing so not just re-introduced a new generation to classic literature through Instagram, but helped re-imagine the NYPL's mission for today.



# Libraries are losing relevance amongst our youngest readers

Since 1895, the New York Public Library has formed a critical part of New York's intellectual fabric. A model for libraries all over the world, it strives to "inspire lifelong learning, advance knowledge, and strengthen communities." For over 100 years, the Library worked to deliver on this promise for all readers by fostering community, curiosity, and reverence for the written word.

But this promise was increasingly under threat. By 2016, only 20% of U.S. teenagers reported reading a book, magazine, or newspaper daily vs. 80% who consumed digital content<sup>1</sup>. Library attendance rates are declining across the country, particularly amongst millennials and Gen Z, and despite the best efforts of many, no one seems able to reverse them.

HEALTH • RESEARCH

## A Third of Teenagers Don't Read Books for Pleasure Anymore

August 20, 2018

Teens Today Spend More Time on Digital Media, Less Time Reading

*One of every three teenagers has not read a book for pleasure in a year, study says*

## Sharp decline in children reading for pleasure, survey finds

**Study of young American readers shows a fall of nearly 10% since 2010 of young readers doing so 'for fun'**

## THERE'S A CRISIS OF READING AMONG GENERATION Z

As young people read less and less, they may be short-circuiting their reading brains.

The challenge

**To survive and thrive, the NYPL needed to tackle the challenge head on, finding a new way to build a meaningful and enduring engagement with an elusive generation living online.**

# The solution lies in the problem

Conventional wisdom tells us that when books are under siege, social media is the enemy.

The more time we spend mindlessly swiping, frying our brains and eroding our attention spans, the less capable we are of engaging with long-form literature.

Conventional wisdom also tells us that to succeed we must inspire young minds to put down their phones and pick up a book.

By telling them that reading will make them happier.  
Smarter.  
Sexier.  
Would enrich their lives, bring them joy, and make them cool. #CoolKidsRead

Much to our collective shame, this is exactly where we started.

We had ideas that were provocative, funny and compelling. But they were also, we soon realized, completely wrong. We were looking at the issue through our own eyes—those of book lovers and judgemental adults—and not the eyes of our Gen Z audience.

We needed to change approach. And it started by questioning our most fundamental assumption:

## Is social media an enemy or an ally?

# Gen Z is the stories generation

We took a step back and looked at the facts. And something stood out to us.

500 million Instagram stories are watched every day. 72% of US teens use the platform.

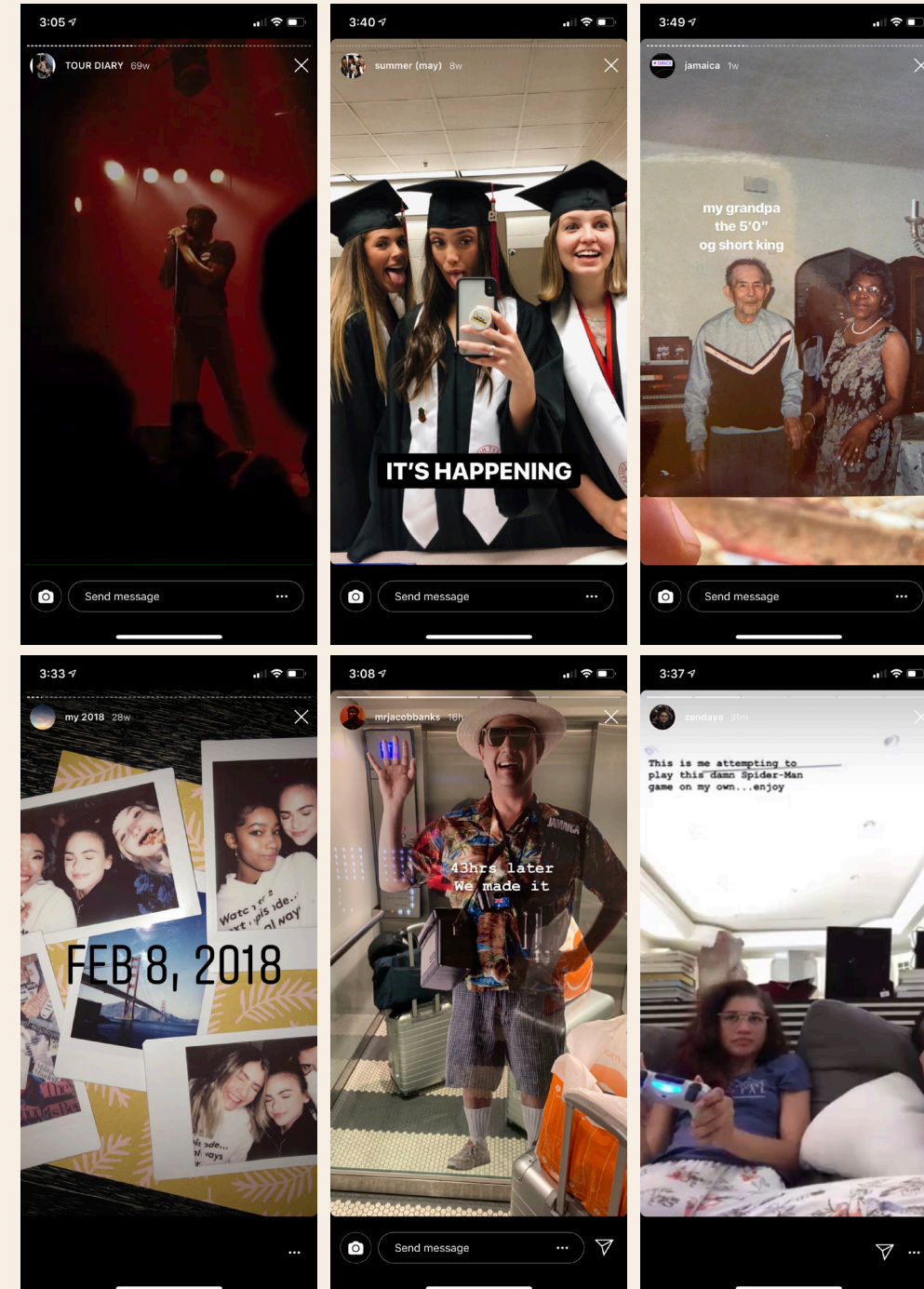
And most tellingly, they're spending on average over 30 minutes a day there<sup>2</sup>. And when we dug in beyond those facts we discovered something even more compelling.

We found Gen Z immersing themselves in plot lines, character profiles, and narrative arcs. We watched Gen Z seek out great storytellers and attempt to tell their own. We watched Gen Z launch, cry, and lose themselves in stories. Instagram stories.

We watched them treat Instagram like they would the library—their home of great storytelling.

Our insight came into view:

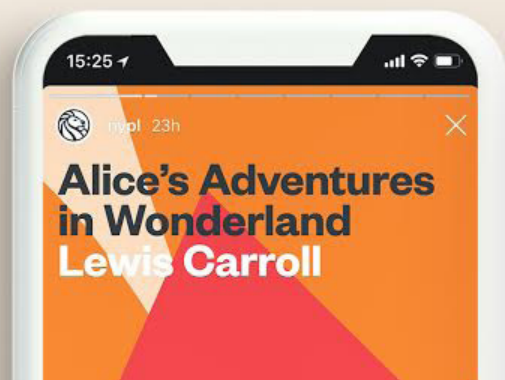
Far from rejecting stories, all that had changed is where and how Gen Z were finding them.



<sup>2</sup>Psychology of Popular Media Culture

Strategy

**Rather than try bring  
young people to the  
library, we must bring  
the library to them**



Idea

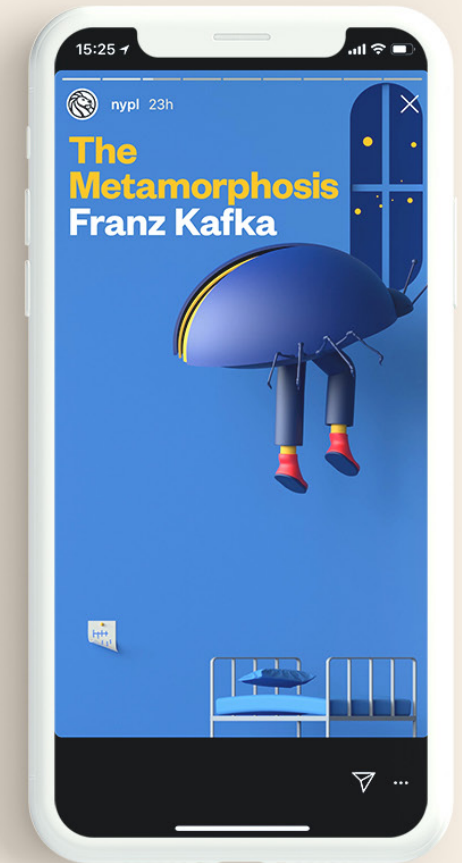
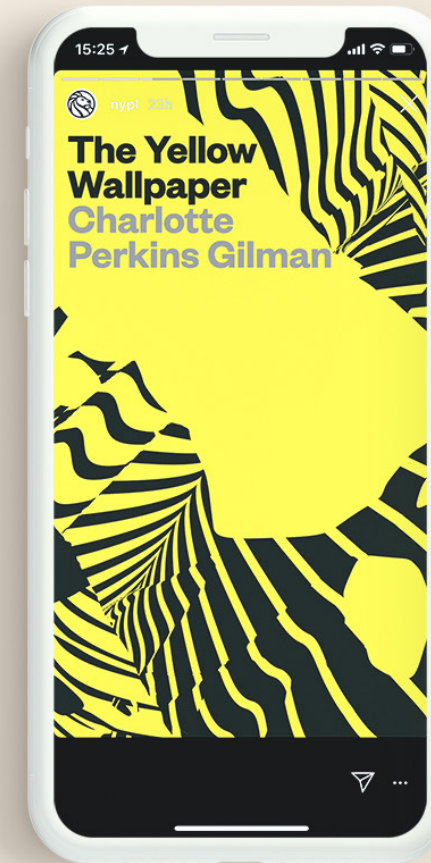
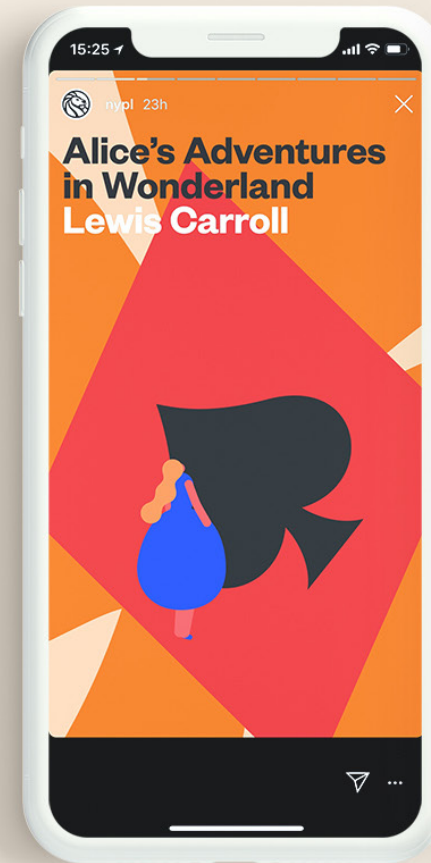
# The world's first digital bookshelf

We created Insta Novels, the first digital library built specifically for Instagram.

To build it involved hacking the Instagram platform to do something never done before – merging traditional publishing with modern technology - to post three classic long-form pieces of literature as Instagram Stories.

The titles we selected were *The Yellow Wallpaper*, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, and *The Raven*.

And we built each story in a way that both preserved the integrity of the work while creating a totally new way to consume literature for the modern age. And while we begun with three books, the shelf itself is infinite.





Idea

# Both a new and familiar experience

Insta Novels felt intuitive and comfortable for both book readers and avid Instagram users who could now engage in a more immersive reading experience unlike any other.

We collaborated with insta-famous artists and animators to transform each page of the novel into a beautifully crafted image, designed specifically for Instagram.

The cover art became an animated trailer, type-face, page colour and justification all had to be re-thought. And most importantly, where Instagram stories 'turns the page' for you, we created a thumb hold for each page putting the reader in control their experience

In short, whereas before a library was a place you had to visit, Insta Novels created a library that came to you.

## In-book Animations

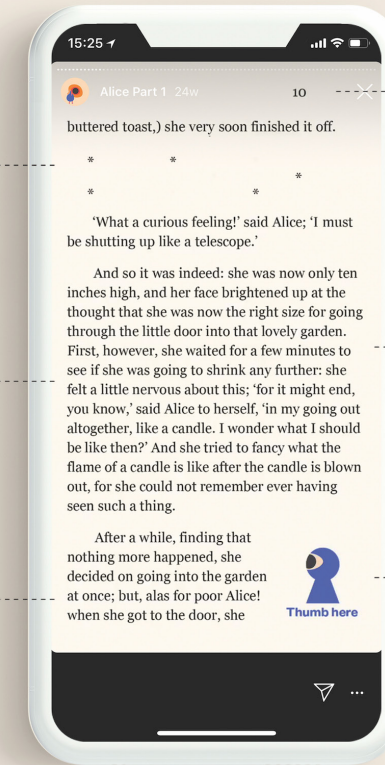
Animations that mirror the unique layouts of the original works.

## Gegoria

Georgia, a typeface that pays homage to the history of the written word in both print and digital

## Left Justified

Anchoring the reader, so they know where the next line will start each time.



## Pg No. Position

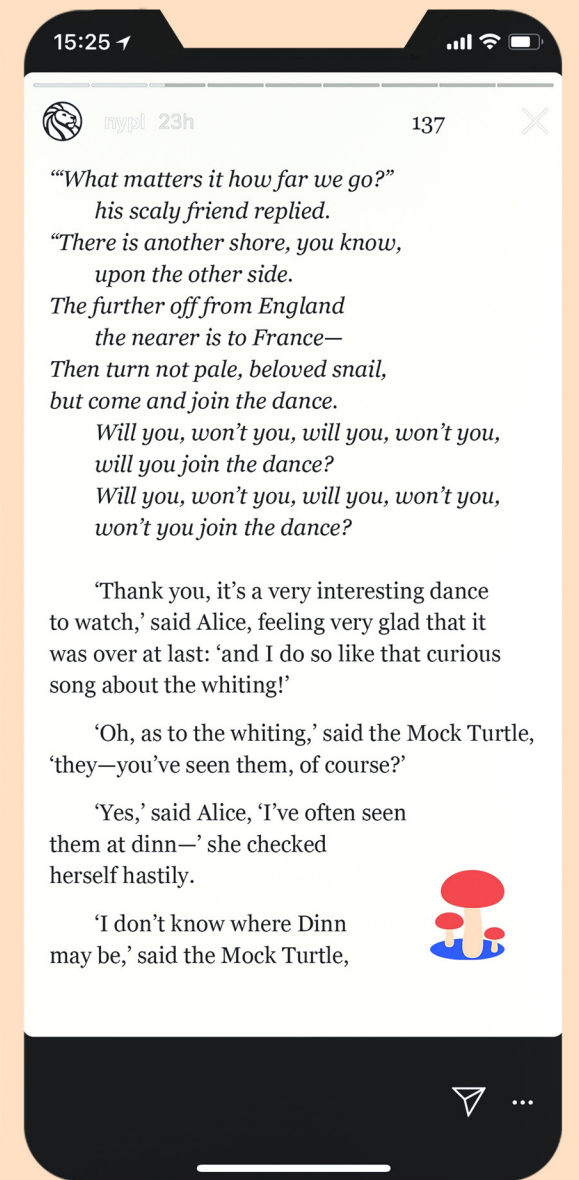
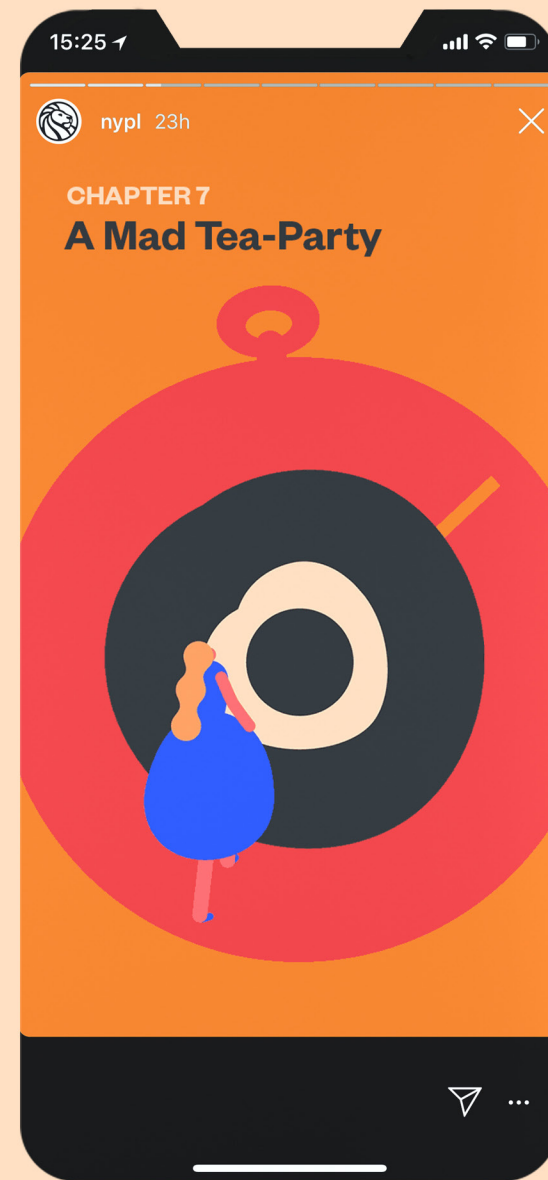
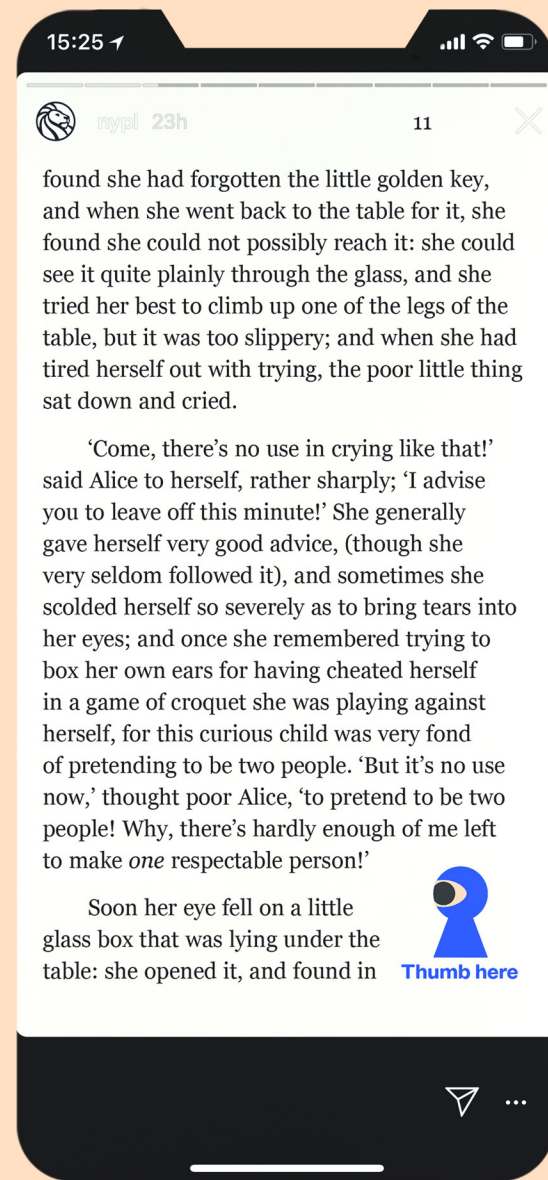
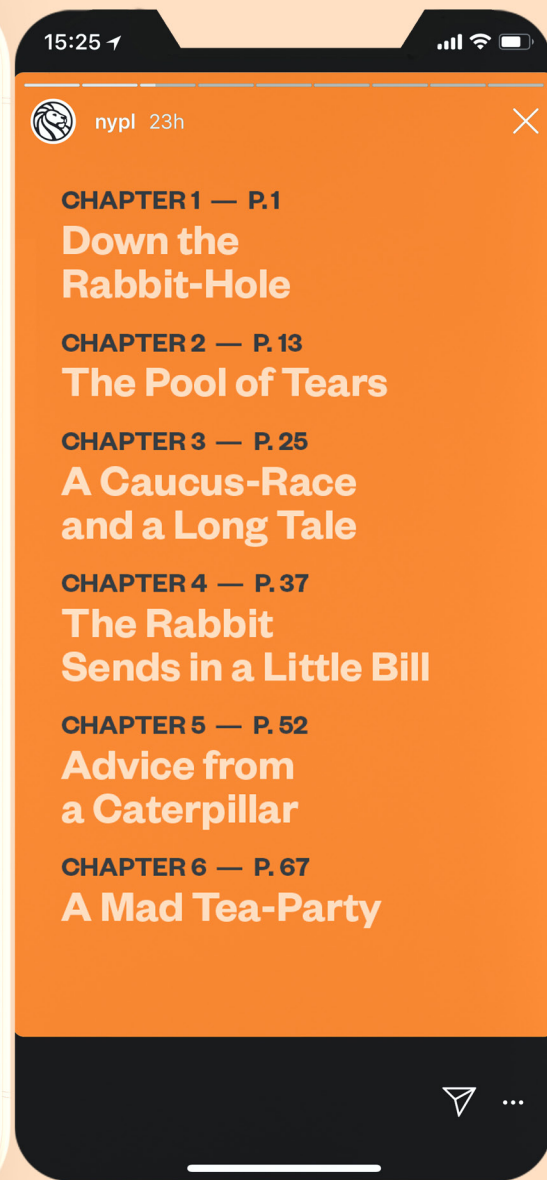
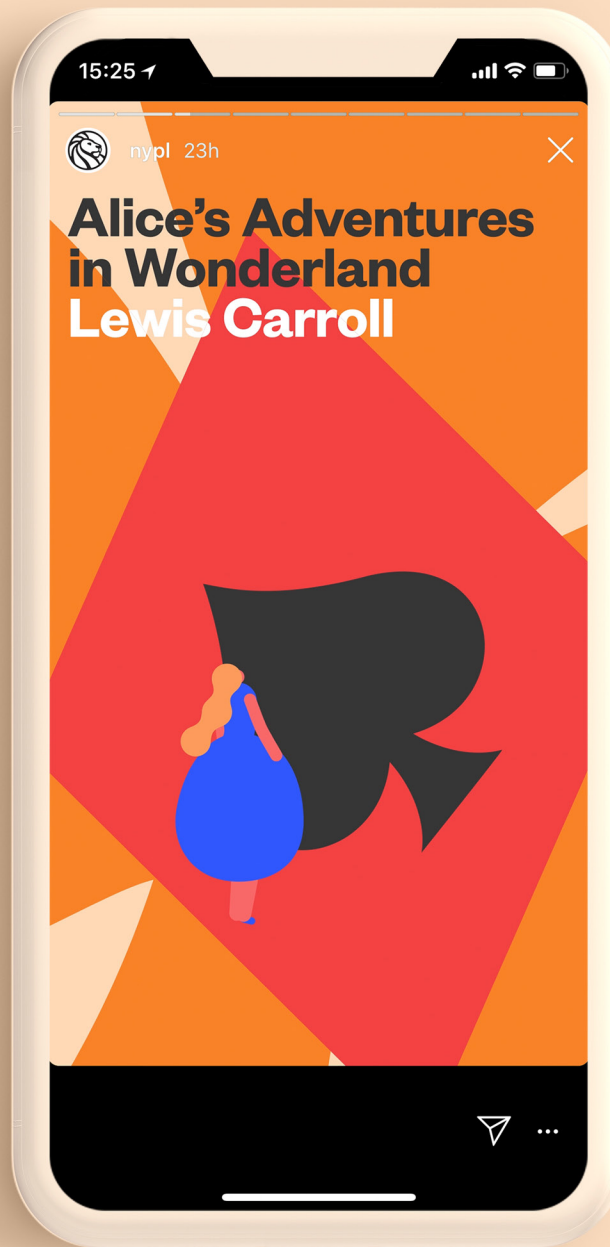
Page number positioned in relation to Instagram UI elements like the X and username / Story title.

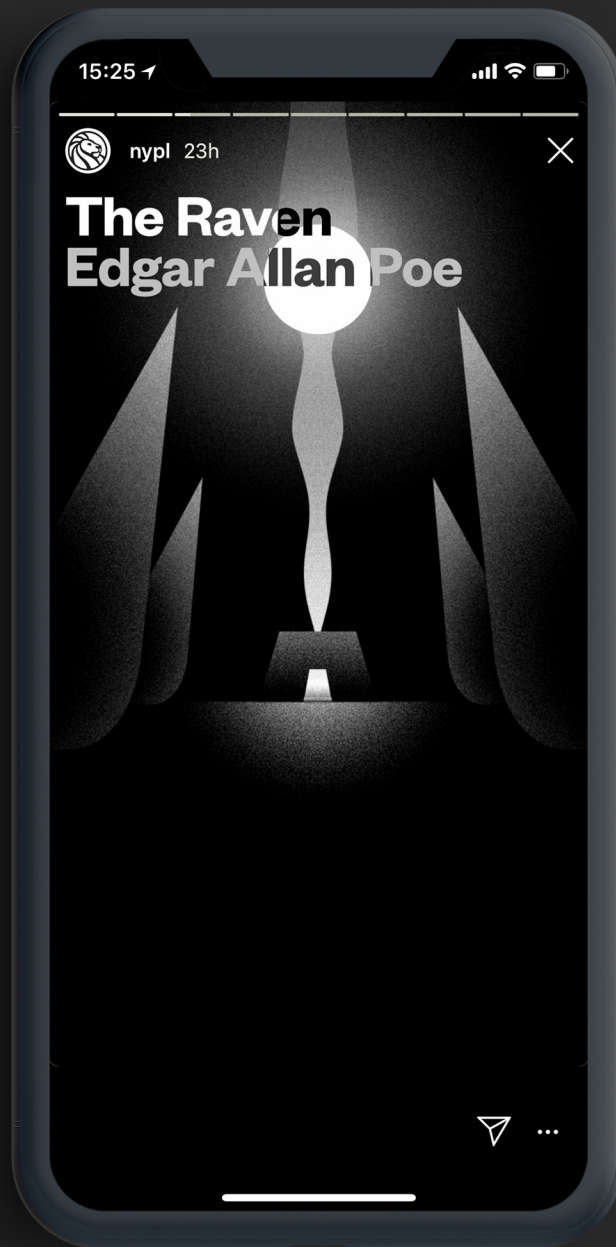
## #fffaf0

The background is a warmer white that's easier to read on screen.

## Thumb Rest

Rest your thumb on the screen to hold the page. Lift your thumbs to turn the page. Doubles as a flipbook: if a reader lets the book run they see an animation.





15:25 15:25 15:25 15:25

nypl 23h nypl 23h nypl 23h nypl 23h

BROUGHT TO YOU BY  
**The New York  
Public Library**

ILLUSTRATIONS BY  
**Psyop / Studio AKA**

TEXT SOURCED FROM  
**Project Gutenberg**


15:25 15:25 15:25 15:25

nypl 23h nypl 23h nypl 23h nypl 23h

4

Open here I flung the shutter, when, with many  
a flirt and flutter,  
In there stepped a stately Raven of the saintly  
days of yore.  
Not the least obeisance made he; not a minute  
stopped or stayed he;  
But, with mien of lord or lady, perched above  
my chamber door—  
Perched upon a bust of Pallas just above my  
chamber door—  
Perched, and sat, and nothing more.

Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy  
into smiling,  
By the grave and stern decorum of the  
countenance it wore,  
"Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou,"  
I said, "art sure no craven,  
Ghastly grim and ancient Raven wandering  
from the Nightly shore,—  
Tell me what thy lordly name is on  
the Night's Plutonian shore!"  
Quoth the Raven,  
"Nevermore."



**Thumb here**

15:25 15:25 15:25 15:25

nypl 23h nypl 23h nypl 23h nypl 23h

**NEVERMORE**


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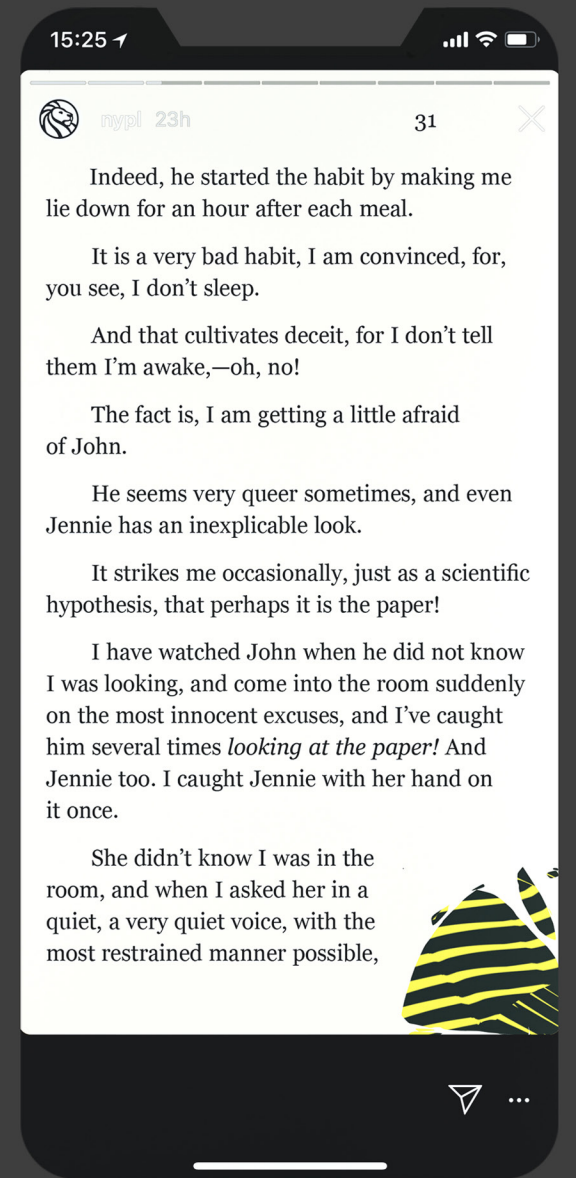
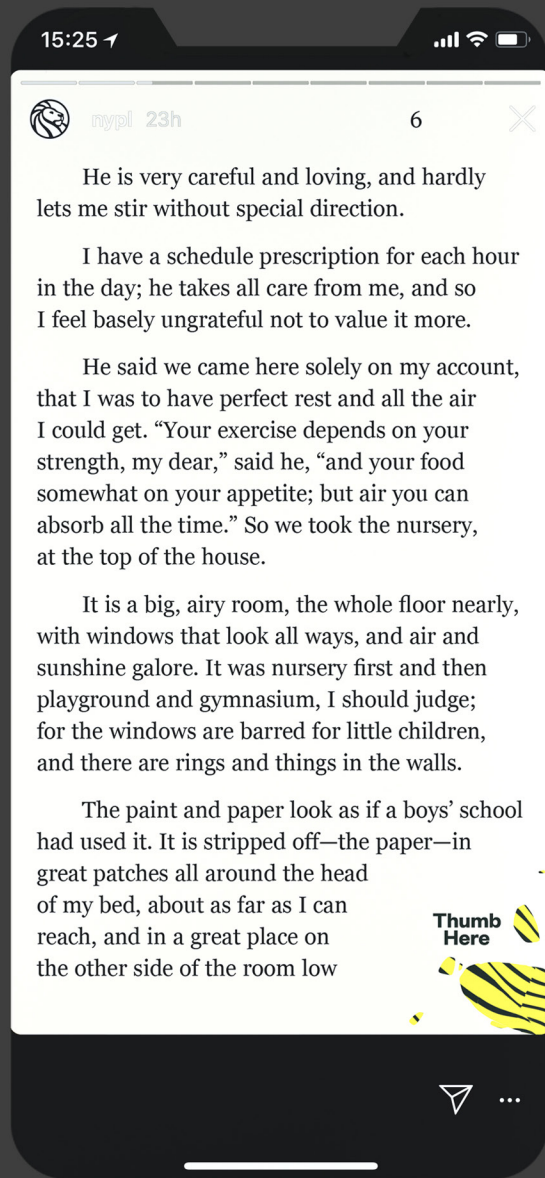
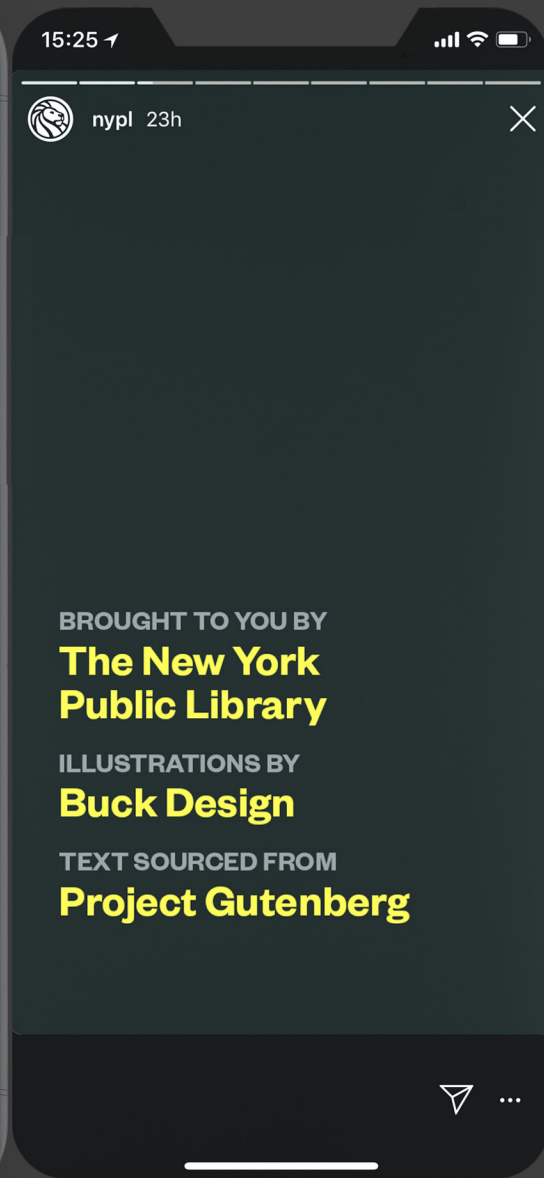
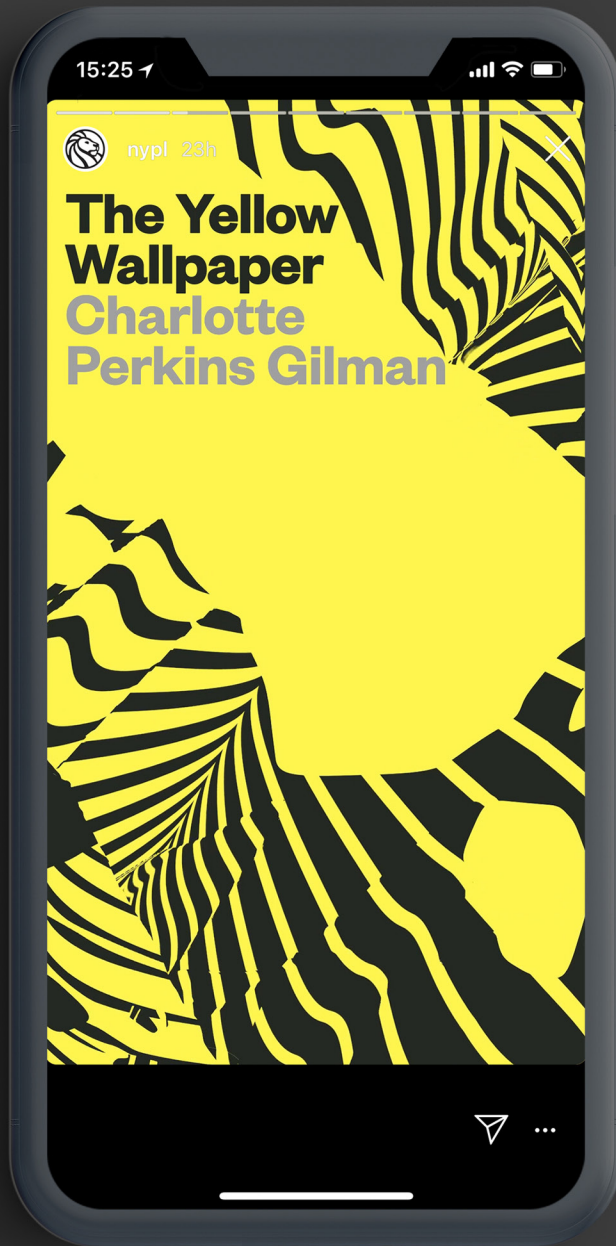
nypl 23h nypl 23h nypl 23h nypl 23h

8

"Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil—prophet still,  
if bird or devil!—  
Whether Tempter sent, or whether tempest  
tossed thee here ashore,  
Desolate yet all undaunted, on this desert land  
enchanted—  
On this home by Horror haunted—tell me truly,  
I implore—  
Is there—is there balm in Gilead?—tell me—  
tell me, I implore!"  
Quoth the Raven "Nevermore."

"Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil—prophet still,  
if bird or devil!  
By that Heaven that bends above, us—by that  
God we both adore—  
Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the  
distant Aidenn,  
It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels  
name Lenore—  
Clasp a rare and radiant maiden  
whom the angels name  
Lenore."  
Quoth the Raven,  
"Nevermore."





## Results

# New readers, in new places

Within the first 24 hours of launch, NYPL's Instagram following grew 700% and has more than doubles since. To date, over 300,000 Insta Novels have been read proving the popularity of a new type of reading experience and the continued desiree to get lost in captivating stories.

With a media budget the same price as a library card (free) and a small production budget of \$15,000 Insta Novels garnered \$7.1 million worth of earned media impressions.

But beyond the new followers and engagement within the platform there was a far more important outcome.

**\$0**

Media Spending

=

**\$7.1 M**

Earned Media

**7x**

followers in first 24 hours

**300K**

Books Read

**700+**

News Mentions

## Results

# An instant classic that rippled through culture and changed behavior

By merging publishing and social media, Insta Novels sparked both cultural conversation and triggered new behaviors amongst not only our disengaged Gen Zers but readers at large.

Mainstream, national, and even international news outlets including the Economist, Wall Street Journal, New York Times, BBC, and NBC took note and applauded Insta Novels' ingenuity and influence. More powerfully, teachers are including InstaNovels in their curriculum; other institutions with a mission to educate and inform were reaching out to to use the platform; authors wanted to create original works for it; and even Instagram is talking to us about changing its platform in order to make our Insta Novels-like functionality permanent.

What started out as a campaign to re-engage young reader, Insta Novels has re-imagined the NYPL for today, moving a 100+ year old institution into the future, quelled cultural anxiety about the loss of readership, and reversed a generational decline in a way no other institution had.

By making our enemy our ally, we managed to merge publishing and social media to create a whole new format of publishing, write the next chapter of the NYPL's story, and change how people will consume books for generations to come.

