

The Basics of Running a Summer Reading Club for Teens

A summer reading club tailored to the interests of teens is a great way to keep them using the library and encouraging them to become life-long readers. If you've never run a teen reading club, or would like to redesign your current method, here are some concepts to consider when creating your club. When in doubt about what teens in your community want or would enjoy, ask them.

Have a Separate Club for Teens

The reasons for having a separate club for teens are essentially the same reasons for having a separate collection.

- Most teens would not be caught dead in the children's area surrounded by 3-year-olds and picture books. They want their own space.
- Most of the things that make a children's summer reading club fun and attractive to children are exactly the things that make it unappealing to teens.
- Adolescence is a time of change. Teens no longer want to be considered children, yet they are not yet adults. A separate program can address their specific needs.

If this is the first time you are doing a summer reading club for teens, have realistic expectations. You cannot judge the success of the teen program by statistically comparing it to the children's program. Don't expect a huge turnout for the first time (or even the subsequent summers).

Planning Your Program

Planning for a summer reading program should begin long before the summer. When planning the structure, prizes, incentives and thematic elements of your program, you will want to keep in mind the goals of your program.

Your goals might be to:

- Entice more teens to use the library.
- Promote teen services and resources of the library.
- Encourage recreational reading during summer months.
- Provide opportunities for teens to be recognized for their reading and feel good about themselves.

Talk to teens every chance you can about what they would like to see in a reading program. Ask them what types of special events they would like to attend or if

participating online is easier for them. Use the input you receive to help set up your program.

Structure

Structure the teen club to make it enjoyable for the teens in your community. Remember that the club should be fun and rewarding. It should not seem like school or have goals that are too difficult. The structure of your club is determined by two essential elements: reading and recording.

Reading:

Traditionally, readers count the number of books or pages read to receive prizes. Many libraries have chosen to count time spent reading instead. Some libraries choose to have readers set their own reading goals in minutes or books, while others have teens set a personalized goal that has value to them. Still others may emphasize the fact that taking the time to read regularly is what encourages people to become lifetime readers, and so they have participants keep track of the number of days on which they read. There are benefits to each of these, and you will have to decide what is right for your community.

Recording:

How will teens keep track of their reading? Will they keep their reading logs at the library or at home? Do they need to interact with library staff to fill in the logs? Whatever structure you decide on, keep it simple for the benefit of both the teens and the library staff. Whichever method you select should be fun and make it easy for teens to *succeed*.

Incentives and Prizes

Once you have decided the structure of the reading club, determine how you will reward participants. Will everyone receive something, or just those who reach some set goal? Will you have a weekly raffle? Will there be a grand-prize winner? What types of prizes will you give? Books, gift certificates to book stores and music stores, T-shirts and temporary tattoos are all options. Be sure that the prizes appeal to teens. Budget for prizes, but be aware that you may be able to supplement your supply with donations from the community.

Theme

Use the theme in a way that will intrigue teens. Using the Collaborative graphics to create a uniform look to your program and give you something identifiable to sell to teens.

Marketing the Club

If your teen program is new, you may have to market it heavily and distribute lots of publicity. There are some special considerations, though, for getting the message out to

teens. An important difference between teens and children is that parents are usually the ones who hear about the children's club and sign up their children. For the teen program, you want to reach out to teens themselves and let *them* decide if they want to join the program. Thus, your promotional materials and efforts should be directed towards the teens. Promote the club in your local schools, through visits and booktalks and in the places where you find teens—the mall, pizza parlor, video store, bookstore, local hangouts and clubs. Fliers and posters should have teen appeal.

Do's and Don'ts

1. Do keep it as simple as possible. Who wants to participate in a program that's too complicated? Make it easy for teens to understand by having easy record keeping and by prominently posting a clear and simple explanation of how the club works. Similarly, make the program easy for all staff to understand and support. If your library has a small staff, make sure your program doesn't require a lot of staff interaction.
2. Do make it rewarding for teens to participate by having reachable goals.
3. Don't expect the same level of participation the children's program will have. Set reasonable goals for yourself.
4. Do make your teen area attractive. If you're going to lure teens to the library for the summer reading club, you need to create an inviting environment and provide an exciting collection. This also should be where information about the club, registration and records are located. Don't force teens to sign up in the children's area.
5. Do give exciting and age-appropriate incentives.
6. Do ask teens for their invaluable input!