

Get with the Program, Dude...

Teenage Guys and Library Programming

RW: Hey guys, VOYA topic: Teen guys and library programming. I cringed remembering some bad times.

ER: Not me. I loved programming for guys.

SH: I love it, too, but I also have several painful programming memories.

RW: No longer a teen librarian, I'm way out of the loop. But Elsworth and Summer may have up-to-the-minute insights!

ER: Here at Oak Park Public Library, I feel pretty involved but rarely do the actual facilitation.

SH: I usually have from one to three programs each week. I'm surprised at what works and have no clue about the magical programming success key.

RW: Library workshops can be places to pick up ideas.

ER: Even in the height of that "let's all talk about programming for teens" trend, teen guys did not get addressed. A presenter once talked about mother and daughter clubs, tea party book clubs, book clubs that could earn Girl Scout badges . . . but didn't mention guys at all. At the end of her presentation, she alluded that teen guys don't participate in book groups.

SH: Some of my most dedicated and thoughtful book club participants have been guys. And Elsworth, some colleagues of mine have a Guys Read book club with tweens and teens. Totally successful: <http://blogs.kcls.org/bothell/kids/guys-read/>.

RW: Programming ideas seem geared to middle school girls making crafts and such. I wasn't comfortable fumbling a craft program demonstration.

ER: But don't rule out craft or cooking programs for guys. I had a successful Teen Sew Club program. At least half of the participants were guys and some crafts, like steampunk jewelry or altering books, might draw a mix of participants.

SH: Guys like to make stuff just as much as girls, and I always get lots of guys at craft programs. With arts programs cut out of school budgets, I love the opportunity to fill that creative gap at my library.

RW: I searched the Internet with "library programs teenage guys," and came up with . . . **Pinterest!** I don't know Jessica Young, but I'm jealous. Tons of her ideas are posted on **Pinterest**: http://pinterest.com/jessica_young2/teen-library-programs/.

RW: Book Spine Poetry (stacking books sideways so the titles make a poem) is like that six word memoir trend that took off a couple of years ago. An example:

Vampire Stories (story collection)

Sold (by Patricia McCormick)

Elsewhere (by Gabrielle Zevin)

ER: What a great idea!

SH: It's a quick and easy program allowing for tons of creativity (and minimal prep work).

RW: Inquiring minds want to know: What programs work for guys?

ER: Structured competition (game tournaments, fantasy football stuff) works well, as does anything with media creation. Making food as part of the program doesn't hurt. But guys have attended "make your own skin care" programs and prom dress exchanges . . . go figure.

SH: Art-based programs like cartooning, manga, 'zines, and graffiti are very guy-friendly. Anything that allows for freedom of expression works very well.

RW: Food, or no food, at teen programs . . . and why?

ER: Yes. Because teen guys are always hungry.

SH: Yes. Because food is a great way to lure them in.

RW: Library space for teen programs? I sometimes made do with dragging chairs to a corner of the youth department. Scheduling a meeting room can involve crawling through many hoops.

ER: My most successful teen programs have been in a designated teen area, but space wrangling is not unknown. Some guys feel awkward participating in the main library floor, so I tried to plan a place where they could participate without feeling conspicuous.

SH: I do all my programming in our library's meeting room where being quiet is a non-issue. Supplies are spread out and we make a mess without disturbing anyone.

RW: Lots of things can go wrong really fast with guys at programs. Mixing guys and girls at a library program can stir hormones, making it tough to be a teen advocate when obnoxious things happen.

ER: Having a group made up of really young teens and older teens can add to the hormone challenges, too.

SH: Sometimes guys get a little too comfortable and forget their "library manners." I've heard some incredibly foul comments during my programs.

RW: Programming pet peeves?

ER: My biggest programming pet peeve is when adults (customers or even other library staff) make comments about teen programming wasting resources, or that it is unnecessary or unfair. *And*, I don't like it when adult caregivers stay and observe a program.

SH: My biggest pet peeve is when guys (and girls) push the limits of what the program offers or they don't follow the rules. I've had kids lie about how many buttons they have made or how much pizza they've eaten. Lots of time and money goes into programming and it's frustrating to feel like you are being taken advantage of. Hearing a "thank you" might be nice.

RW: I hated organizing a program and teens would flock to the bathroom (making noise and upsetting other library staff members), then return to the program and not pay attention.

ER: It can seem like the more successful you get in programming—basically, when more teens start showing up—the more rules you have to have in place. Structure is needed when one or two librarians are facilitating a large group.

RW: What about factors working against programming efforts?

ER: As much as I wish it was different, teens view the library as not a cool place to hang out. Some librarians offer offsite events or other work-arounds to lessen the lack-of-coolness issue.

SH: Lack of time. Once teens get into high school, you are competing against sports, college prep, homework, and jobs. No matter how cool a library program, they may simply not have time.

RW: Getting the word out? Has the social media world made things easier to promote events?

ER: We use social media (Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, YouTube, mobile apps, etc.) for teen publicity. We often send information to the "digital backpack" of the local high school (submitting electronic files that are sent home to the students' adult caregivers). Lots of word-of-mouth marketing.

SH: I rely heavily on word-of-mouth and promote programs when visiting schools. I find having a weekly program really helps; if you have something going on every Wednesday after school, a consistent core group will bring friends.

RW: When is the best time to schedule? I tried Saturdays because after school time is rushed, coming from band, sports, school plays, and more.

ER: We have good luck with a blend of afternoon (after school), evening, and weekend programs, but our biggest draw is generally "afterhours," when we schedule a teen event for after the library closes on a Friday or Saturday. It makes teens feel exclusive.

SH: Right after school. We have a huge number of 'tweens and teens with nowhere to go and they spend hours at the library. Programming not only helps control crowds, but directs them to something a bit more constructive than Facebook and computer games.

RW: Let's get away from negatives. Why have teen programs? Is it like Vegas? Get butts in the seats?

ER: I've never worked at a library that really emphasized attendance as a programming goal. My answer would be: Programs develop lifelong library users by providing fun and social events that highlight library resources.

SH: I find my community has so few resources that library programs really fill a gap. It offers a supportive environment and opportunity to engage in something unique, which isn't available at school or home.

RW: Depending on your library's structure, there may be a long list of people to notify about the who, what, when, where, and why of your teen program.

ER: The adult and teen services departments at OPPL uses a peer-led programming committee model for selecting and approving programs. There isn't a lot of paperwork, but the teen librarians have to pitch their ideas to the larger group and get support.

SH: Our system gives almost total autonomy to teen librarians for developing and implementing every aspect of programming. We have an incredibly creative group of librarians who share program ideas.

RW: Volunteering is a big buzz word when dealing with teens in the library. Have you guys had any experience with teen volunteering? I had teens help the children's librarians facilitate craft programs for pre-school children.

ER: I've had the . . . um, pleasure of overseeing multiple large-scale summer volunteer programs throughout my career. It's a huge challenge to find enough meaningful work for big groups of teens to do. They get stuff done fast. At OPPL, there is a great model that groups teens with like interests. This year we have teens creating environmental art in local parks, yarn bombing the library branches, and creating a time capsule about the library in 2012.

HEY! GUYS LIKE NONFICTION BOOKS!

RW: There's new buzz about nonfiction in school curriculums called the common core. An article in July 18, 2012 of *Publishers Weekly*, "What Common Core Means for Publishers" by Karen Springen, provides information. Unfortunately, many public libraries are cutting back on curriculum support titles.

ER: It's about time. Those matching sets have never been appealing.

SH: Nor do they circulate.

RW: There's a push to recommend narrative nonfiction books for each topic taught. I'm totally surprised. Our public library teen shelves are about ninety percent fiction.

ER: Some guys like reading only nonfiction and this gives them room for success. Hopefully, some of the narrative nonfiction will remove musty historical fiction from the state lists.

SH: This is a great time for high-interest non-fiction. Publishers seem enthused about meeting the demand.

RW: What nonfiction titles, or at least topics, are essential to a public library? Especially, nonfiction titles guys will pick up.

ER: I think it's crucial to offer teens a high interest nonfiction section. Books about cars, sex, entertainers, sports, and body modification will get a lot of love, especially if you keep the collections current.

SH: Memoirs! Nic Sheff's *Tweak: Growing Up on Methamphetamines* (Atheneum, 2008) and Jay-Z's *Decoded* (Spiegel & Grau, 2010) need constant replacement.

RW: *Guinness Book of World Records* (Guinness World Records, 1955-). A browser's delight.

ER: Don't be stingy with the pricier titles. Buy several copies of books like *Guinness Book of World Records* and let them circulate.

RW: How about how-to-draw books? Drawing manga has always been a hit.

ER: Bulk up on creative topics which spark programming opportunities.

SH: I always get guys of all ages asking for drawing books, everything from comics and manga to realistic figure drawing.

RW: So many copies of the *WWE Encyclopedia* (Dorling Kindersly, 2009) were "lost?" I had to re-order. The good news? A second edition came out in September!

ER: Theft is a good indicator that you're making solid selections. Beat-up copies may rarely circulate but get lots of in-house use. Replace "lost" nonfiction as long as your budget lasts.

SH: Absolutely. I constantly replace *The Rose That Grew from Concrete* (MTV, 1999), but I'll buy it as long as it keeps disappearing.

LAST WORD

Programming is a mixed bag, but can have great outcomes. Seek help! Remember, it takes a village to make a guy a library user. ■

