

BEYOND BOOKS: THE SCHOOL LIBRARIAN'S GUIDE TO CHECKOUT KITS

School libraries are places of discovery, creativity, curiosity, and connection. Checkout kits can extend learning beyond the library walls by giving students hands-on experiences they can explore at home, in classrooms, or with their families. By providing checkout kits as a meaningful and high-impact addition to the library program, school librarians can encourage reading, support curriculum, build STEM skills, foster creativity, and increase student engagement. A large budget or a huge collection isn't necessary to get started. Even a few thoughtfully designed kits can make an impact.

Checkout kits can help your library:

- ✓ Increase student engagement and circulation
- ✓ Support literacy, STEM, and inquiry-based learning
- ✓ Encourage family involvement and at-home learning
- ✓ Provide equitable access to enriching experiences
- ✓ Showcase the evolving role of the school library

Start with Purpose

Before purchasing materials or assembling kits, take a moment to think intentionally about what you hope the kits will accomplish. Start small. Launching with 5-10 well-planned kits is often more successful than trying to build a huge collection right away.

Questions to Consider

- What age group(s) will the kits serve?
- What goals will the kits support? (literacy, STEM, creativity, curriculum, family engagement)

- Will kits include consumable or reusable materials?
- How many pieces are manageable for checkout?
- How will kits be stored and inventoried?
- What budget or funding sources are available?
- How will students learn about and access the kits?

Checkout Kit Ideas by Grade Level

Elementary School (K-5)

Young learners thrive on exploration, storytelling, and hands-on play.

- **Literacy Kits:** Pair books with activities that deepen comprehension and spark excitement about reading.
 - **Ideas include:**
 - Story retelling kits with puppets or props
 - Read-aloud companion activities
 - Family literacy backpacks
 - Beginning reader games
 - Author or book character kits
 - **Example:** *The Three Little Pigs* book + puppets + STEM building challenge
- **STEM & Maker Kits:** Encourage curiosity and problem-solving.
 - **Ideas include:**
 - LEGO building challenges
 - Magna-Tiles exploration
 - Coding robot kits
 - Building and engineering challenges
 - Science investigation kits
- **Creativity & Wellness Kits:** Support imagination and self-regulation.
 - **Ideas include:**
 - Art prompt kits
 - Nature observation bags
 - Mindfulness or calm-down kits
 - Journaling and creativity kits

Middle School (6-8)

Middle school students enjoy exploration and independence, so give them opportunities for voice and choice. The more ownership they feel, the more likely they are to check kits out.

- **High-Interest Learning Kits**
 - Escape room kits
 - Podcasting starter kits
 - Graphic novel creation kits
 - Stop-motion animation kits
 - Dungeons & Dragons starter kits
 - Coding or electronics kits
- **Literacy & Enrichment Kits**
 - Genre exploration kits
 - Book club kits
 - Mystery-solving challenges
 - Creative writing kits

High School (9-12)

High school kits can focus on interests, future readiness, and creativity. Think beyond academics: High school students still enjoy play, hobbies, and creative exploration.

- **Career & Life Skills Kits**
 - Career exploration kits
 - Interview preparation materials
 - Financial literacy kits
 - College and scholarship resources
- **Creative & Passion-Based Kits**
 - Photography kits
 - Journaling or mindfulness kits
 - Crochet or crafting starter kits
 - Chess or strategy game kits
 - Podcasting or content creation kits

- **Academic Support Kits**

- SAT/ACT prep kits
- STEM investigation kits
- Research support tools

K-12 Kit Ideas That Work at Any Grade Level

Some kits can easily be adapted for multiple age groups.

- **Try:**

- Puzzle kits
- Board game kits
- Makerspace-to-go kits
- Family literacy kits
- Cultural exploration kits
- Seasonal activity kits
- Kindness kits
- Nature and outdoor exploration bags

What Makes a Great Checkout Kit?

The best kits are simple, clear, and easy to use.

Include:

- ✓ Materials or manipulatives
- ✓ Clear instructions or activity cards
- ✓ A book connection (when possible)
- ✓ QR codes to videos or extension activities
- ✓ An inventory checklist
- ✓ Storage that is durable and easy to organize

Keep in Mind: Less is often more. A kit with a few engaging components is often easier to manage and more likely to be used than one with too many complicated pieces.

Managing Checkout Kits

Many librarians hesitate to start kits because they worry about lost pieces or added management, but the good news is that perfection is not required!

Tips for Success

- **Start with a pilot:** Try a small collection before scaling up.
- **Keep inventory simple:** Use a laminated checklist inside each kit.
- **Choose durable storage:** Plastic bins, zipper pouches, backpacks, or labeled tote bags work well.
- **Set clear expectations:** Explain checkout rules and due dates.
- **Accept that wear-and-tear happens:** If students are using the kits, that's a sign they are valued.
- **Gather feedback:** Ask students what they love and what they want next.

Funding Your Kits

Checkout kits don't have to be expensive. You may also be surprised by what families, teachers, or community partners are willing to donate.

Possible Funding Sources

- School or district funds
- PTO/PTA mini-grants
- Community foundations
- Local business sponsorships
- DonorsChoose projects
- Library grants
- Community donations

Start Small. Think Big.

You don't need dozens of elaborate kits to create impact. Choose one audience, one goal, and one simple idea to pilot this year. See what students respond to, learn from the experience, and build over time. Sometimes, all it takes is one great kit to spark curiosity.