

Stress-Free Programming for Teens

Stop the Stress and Do More by Doing Less

By Samantha Larsen Hastings

Have you begged, bribed, and bartered with teens to convince them to come to library programs with little results? Have you advertised, at the library, at schools, at community centers with no increase of attendance? Have you spent hours planning, preparing, and presenting programs with pathetic numbers to show for your hard work? It's time to stop!

In the popular Disney movie *Freaky Friday*, the teenager Anna, while inhabiting her mother's body, explains to adults everywhere, "Quality time with your kids: You know what? Quit bugging 'em. Leave 'em alone. They like it!"¹ Stop trying to convince your teens to participate in your activities—instead give them stress-free independent programs.

Independent Programs

Definition: Programs without a specific time or place. Programs where teens don't have to

talk to a librarian or anyone else. Programs that require little staff preparation, minimal maintenance, and quick clean up.

Like many other librarians who plan and promote teen programming, I found myself frustrated with how hard I was trying only to get small results. Despite my low programming numbers, the circulation in the Young Adult Fiction collection increased more than 15 percent in 2007. I turned to independent programming to reach out to teens that were using library materials and services but not talking to librarians.

"Thank you so much! Yes, I have received the news and am so excited! Who knew that I would win?"
—Bronwyn (13).

Independent Programming Ideas

Here are a few independent programming ideas to inspire you:

Book Predictions

Are teens waiting for the next book in their favorite series? Are they speculating on what will happen to whom and when? Have teens write down their predictions either in print or online. For print, have the teens write their prediction on one side of the paper and their contact information on the other. Place the predictions in a decorated three-ring binder (contact information not showing) so that other teens can read the predictions. For online predictions, have teens e-mail or post them to a library blog or MySpace account. Drawings, small prizes, and treat incentives make this program popular. The latest prediction program at my library was for the final book of the bestselling *Twilight* series. Teens wrote predictions and chose between a *Twilight* tattoo or a sucker. All predictions were entered in a drawing to receive a new copy of *Breaking Dawn* the day the book it was released.

Take-Then-Make Crafts

Make-and-Take Crafts are popular at many libraries. Instead of having teens

make the craft in the library, try handing out the craft materials and instructions in a plastic baggy so they can take them and make them wherever and whenever they want. For Teen Read Week 2007, I handed

SAMANTHA LARSEN HASTINGS is a Public Services Librarian for Salt Lake County (Utah) Library Services. She is Chair of the Utah Library Association's Young Adult Round Table 2008–09.

out LOL zipper-pull kits with an 8-inch black cord, a zipper pull, two square “L” beads and one square “O” bead. Additional colored and round beads and smiley face beads were available for teens to personalize their zipper-pulls.

Quizzes/Handouts

The easiest type of independent programming is creating handouts. Pop culture quizzes, text message quizzes, crosswords, and surveys can be posted online or printed. When a teen completes a quiz he or she turns it in at a desk to get a choice of a small prize or treat.

“Yay!! Thanks so much for choosing my song!”—
Samantha (15).

Writing Contests

From short stories to six-word biographies, many teens are accomplished and motivated writers who want attention, recognition, and a place to publish. Specify the length, format, and theme for the entries in the contest. You can create writing contests around holidays, themes, and publish the entries in library newsletters, on library websites, blogs, MySpace, or teen zines.

Extreme Makeover: Book Cover Edition

Judge the book by its cover! Teens create new book covers for their favorite books. Teens can draw, paint, or digitally create a new book cover (no copyrighted material). Display the book covers with the original books.

Book Reviews

The most popular independent program at my library is writing book reviews. I place a “Win a Free Book” sign in the teen area with book review forms and a slotted box. In the first week the box was so full that I had to empty it. I now empty the box every couple of weeks and draw names for free books. The books are from donations or leftovers from the summer reading club.

Reading the teen reviews lets me know what teens like, what they don’t like, and what they are looking for in a book. Here are just a few teen reviews:

- Ryan P. (14). *Twilight* by Stephenie Meyer: “I love the whole book.”
- McKenzie M. (12). *Fairest* by Gail Carson Levine: “It was fun, different, and creative.”
- Jessica J. (17). *Mimus* by Lilli Thal: “*Mimus* is one of my favorite books. It’s interesting and almost creepy. Very cool.”

Conclusion

Don’t give up on teen programming; just stop trying to get busy teens to come to a certain place at a specific time. Try stress-free independent programming at your library, you may accomplish more by doing less. **YALS**

Reference

1. Mark Waters, *Freaky Friday*, (Anaheim, Calif.: Walt Disney Video, 2003).

Text Message Quiz

1. aaf _____
2. b4u _____
3. cm _____
4. dkdk _____
5. plz _____
6. rofl _____
7. NgoC8 _____
8. *vin _____
9. 2L8 _____
10. u+me _____

Text Quiz Answers: (1) aaf = ask a friend (2) b4u = before you (3) cm = call me (4) dkdk = don’t know, don’t care (5) plz = please (6) rofl = rolling on the floor laughing (7) NgoC8 = negotiate (8) *vin = starving (9) 2L8 = too late (10) u+me = you and me

Book Review Form

1. Name/Age _____
2. Email/Phone _____
3. Title of Book _____
4. Author _____
5. How many stars? (circle one)
1 2 3 4 5
6. What did you like or not like about this book?

(You can write more comments on the back)

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