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# Getting Young Adults to Stop & Participate @ Your Library

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**Background**

Young adults can be one of the hardest demographics to get to participate in library programs in substantial numbers. Young adults, or teenagers in the 7-12 grades, tend to have busy schedules and may not have time to come to long, drawn out programs. However, just because young adults do not seem to have time to attend extensive programs does not mean they do not have time for the library. They are still important to the library and should still have programming options.

> Teens are good for libraries because many of them have grown accustomed to outstanding library services as children. In libraries with a children's department, kids are used to being served by specially trained services and special programming, in a unique, "child-friendly" section of the facility. We know that teens will soon enough become the parents, voters, school board, and library board members who will, among other things, make important decisions that help decide the fate of our libraries. (Honnold, 2003, p. xv)

Libraries should value young adults and in doing so "the library sets a good example for the community by valuing teens when there is a special collection and programs developed just for them" (Honnold, 2003, p. 10). Young adults are an essential demographic to keep interested in the library—they become future parent users and voters. Having programming and spaces just them is an easy way to ensure both the library's and the young adults' future. Libraries should base most of the libraries' programming around fun, but also keep in mind of giving them some education on topics such as trivia, matching games, and other programs. Having programs that entice young adults is half the battle in getting them to participate in something at the library. Programs that interest young adults will help bring them in and show them that the library cares about their interest.

With young adults having busy lives, it is difficult to compete with after school jobs, weekend sports events, social obligations, and other extracurricular activities that require their time and attention. Nailing down certain days and times for young adult programs can be difficult and result in low in program attendance numbers. Being flexible and open to other program possibilities is always a good way of getting higher numbers to your programs. Passive programming, which can be done with materials on hand and inexpensive ideas, can be a great way to get young adults in the library and boost programming numbers.

**Passive Programming & Benefits**

Passive programming or independent programming can draw young adults into the library and get them active in the young adult section. Passive programs "are projects, games, and contests available in the young adult room for whenever teens come into the library" (Honnold, 2005). Passive programming can reach teens with varying skill levels and with varied interest. It also requires less staff time than active programming (Jensen & Parker, n.d.). Passive programs have many diverse functions. They "can be used to promote social programs or a new service, be an ongoing presence in the young adult room, or pop up during holidays." (Honnold, 2005, p. 21). Typically, passive programming involves two components—programming and reader's advisory (Jensen & Parker, n.d.). Independent programs can be done online through Facebook or other social media networks or physically in the library.

In addition to being affordable from an economic standpoint, passive programming is easy to promote through social media outlets or by "a sign by the main entrance to your library, an article in your newsletter, school announcements, or make bookmarks or flyers for the main desk." (Honnold, 2003, p. 42). Promoting events no matter what type

they are is important. If no one knows about an event how will they know about it or be able to participate in it. Of course, like with traditional programming, it is important to include the running dates of the programs, age requirements, where entries will be posted, and what the prizes will be if any.

**Examples**
There are many different types of passive programs. It is easy to fit a passive program into an existing program, theme, or special advertisement for a new or popular book. Many libraries are already well versed in making reader's advisory displays and with very little modification could move the displays into passive programming (Jensen & Parker, n.d.). Independent programming can range from scavenger hunts, matching games, personality quizzes, guessing games, award or voting input, trivia games and book reviews. Passive programs can be made to fit pop culture interests or library themed event, such as, National Library Week, Summer Reading, or Teen Tech Week. There are several places to springboard libraries into passive programming like Chase's Calendar of Events, Reaching Teens Subversively through Passive Programming (Jensen & Parker, n.d.), "Quick and Easy Programming" (Fesko, 2011), and "The American Library Association has designated special weeks of the year to celebrate reading, books, and libraries" (Honnold, 2003, p. 19). If none of those peak interest, a quick Google search of library + passive + programming returns a variety of hits from Pinterest boards to slideshares to Google Documents and more.

Matching games can be a success when related to a popular book or movie, "matching games are fairly easy since the answers are provided. These games can be made more difficult by making them fill-in-the-blank games so the teens have to provide the answers" (Honnold, 2003, p. 42). The good thing about this passive program is that it can be made over indefinitely by changing the graphics and subjects for on the slips.

Another version of the matching game would be giving them a list of shipping names, a pair of characters from popular fandoms like, Damon and Elena's shipping name is Delena in the Vampire Diaries fan world, and have them vote for their most favorite ship. Additional matching ideas include: matching characters from the Harry Potter series to their right house, matching sport teams to their correct mascots, and matching public figures, celebrities, or popular figures to their baby pictures or prom pictures. Displaying the correct answers at the end of the duration of the program run is a good way to have them come back to the library. Posting answers can be done in the library, as well as, on social media outlets that the library uses.

**Personal Highlight:**
*For example, in 2011, at the Flowood Public Library I executed a matching game during Valentine's Day by having the teens match literary and/or movie and television characters to their correct partner. They used couples such as Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth Bennett from Pride and Prejudice, Will Turner and Elizabeth Swann from Pirates of the Caribbean, Damon and Elena from Vampire Diaries, and Green Arrow and Black Canary from DC Comics. The teens who were able to match everything up correctly went into a drawing for a prize. When the program ended, I posted the answers from the program on a portion of a huge window that graced their Teen Area.*

Personality quizzes have been around for a long time, almost every popular teenage magazine and even some adult magazines have them. They are a fun passive program easily tied to reading that can range from sorting into different areas and what type of character or personality that you are. Teens at the Flowood Public Library took quizzes so they could be sorted into their correct houses in the Harry Potter world and their district from *The Hunger Games*. It could also easily be done with titles like *Divergent*. These types of personality games are currently very popular on Facebook. An independent program can be made to sort people into fun categories defining what they are in a certain situation. This type of personality quiz can be great for Halloween—like figuring out if personality traits categorize teens as witches, werewolves, vampires, or zombies. Initially, making a personality

quiz takes a bit of research into the topic, but once a standard format is established for these quizzes, they are easily changed and modified. Having teens fill out the answers and having the librarian assess the quizzes makes sure that there is no cheating and gets teens to interact with library staff. During the duration of the program, the participants return to the library to see what their results and their friends' results.  Making passive programs fun and interactive is a sure way of getting it to be a successful event. Of course, do not forget the corresponding book display.

Award or voting passive programs are always fun for young adults, and it lets their voices be heard. The Teen Choice Awards is a great place to find some familiar categories like favorite male actor, favorite female actor, favorite movie, most anticipated summer movie, favorite popular book, favorite female character in a book, and favorite male character in a book. There are many other categories that can be placed on a ballot concerning a young adult award. Other awards can be just for books with titles listed for different genres. Voting can also be done for their favorite "team;" for example, teens could vote to be on Team Edward Cullen versus Team Jacob Black from the *Twiligh*t books. Voting independent programs can even be used as civic engagement and let young adults, especially those not allowed to vote yet, have a chance to voice their opinion for who they think should be the next president of the United States. The possibilities for this type of passive program are endless. Results should be posted for at least a week before taking them down or posted on social media sites where young adults can check back for the results.

Scavenger Hunts can either be an active or a passive program. Passive scavenger hunts, can be made with ease or with some difficulty depending on the theme. "Print copies of the list of questions and hints. Teens can pick up the scavenger hunt questions during study hall at a school library or when they visit the public library, and finish it during their visit. The finished hunts can be turned in at a drawing box and a winner drawn from all correct entries" (Honnold, 2003, p.118). Also, another way of doing a scavenger hunt is getting the community involved. Libraries can partner with local business for a picture scavenger hunt where they have to find a designated item on a list at different locations, the first couple that find all of the items could win a prize. Another variation of this program can be taking a picture with a stuffed animal that is at each location to make it a bit more interesting. The stuffed animal could also be taken around to different businesses and photographed in an area of the business and the teens would have to guess where it is that week. Scavenger hunts can also be done virtually using QR codes and posts to social media for details check out Jensen & Parker's description (n.d.).

Trivia passive programs are easy to make. "Trivia on many subjects provide an endless source of material for games in the YA room. You can post one question a week or several questions for the length of the program. They can be multiple-choice or fill-in-the-blank answers" (Honnold, 2003, p. 45)  Trivia can be made for holidays, sports, movies, and television shows. Correct answers can be posted in the young adult section or on social media outlets. Winners that answer correctly can win a small prize as well.

Book Reviews are yet another way passive programs can be held with young adults. It can be done as simply as having young adults turn in a short review about a book and sharing them on a Read Wall, or you could have them do a bit more, for example, have them do a casting for a popular book that might be turned into a movie soon. Let them do a dream cast before all the actors are chosen for the real film. After they enter in the names, go through the entry forms and pick the actors/actresses with the most nominations and print out pictures of them. Put the pictures with the character's name on a board and show who the young adults wanted for a movie version. Teens at the Flowood library selected a dream cast for *The Hunger Games* movie once they announced a movie was being made. The young adults selected Nina Dobrev for Katniss and Robert Downey Jr. to play Haymitch, as well as other opinions for the rest of the cast. Using QR codes and other online tools, librarians can link to book trailers or have teens create their own book trailers. Teens could also

post quotes from their favorite characters or books to a Facebook page. Book reviews can be a fun yet effective way to make it a library related program. If book reviews turn out to be popular, then an online book discussion might make sense. An online discussion groups can be formed where people can make comments and remark on other people's thoughts on the book.

All of these different independent programs help libraries to reach the young adult demographic. They are quick and easy to make and to provide prizes for. Another way to reach young adults is through cyber passive programming. Independent programming is not just limited to the library in a physical sense. Knowing the way your demographic mainly communications is important as well. Having programs in the library is great, but connecting with young adults on a social networking venue is important. Being open to connecting with them through a social networking venue is important because you will be able to reach them even more in their life. Young adults are consumed with social networking and society is adapting into that venue with every angle. Hashtags are popping up on almost every television show and Facebook icons are on everyone's posters in advertising an event. Social networking is a trend that has shown no signs of fading away, just evolving. Libraries should look at Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and other social media sites as a way to further reach the young adult demographic and show that libraries are trying to adhere to what young adults like and show them that libraries can keep up with the technology trend.

Passive programs can happen on blogs and social networking sites. Passive programs can be on those websites in the form of a poll or an active discussion board. Using an online poll (for example, the best summer blockbuster) can make follow up passive programs easier—once the best blockbuster is determined a trivia quiz on that movie can be created. Using the online venue is free most of the time. There are no charges in joining most of these sites, especially for basic features. Some good social networking sites include, Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Pinterest, and Proboards. There is no need to print off slips or use up millions of pencils that seem to

always walk away.

## Conclusion

Passive programming is a great way to reach the young adult demographic for libraries. Independent programs are quick and easy to create and indefinitely reusable. They are also a great tool to get young people into the library. Libraries do an excellent job of capturing and engaging younger children with lap-sits, story times, and after school programs. Reaching the busy teen population is a struggle for many libraries, whether due to lack of designated space or staffing, lack of budget, lack of know-how, or lack of desire. Libraries need to engage teens; otherwise, engaging them when are adults will be more difficult. "Good teen programs often attract the young adults of the community to the library to see what other services are available. Programs also give librarians an opportunity to interact with, educate, and entertain teens, while providing role models and experiences" (Honnold, 2003, p. xvii).

Passive programming makes it possible to keep young adults engaged and interested in their community's library and have positive impacts in their lives. "In the teen world, fun rather than fundamental life skills is an easier sell. So, bring 'em in with any of these program ideas, but know they might leave with more than a smile on their face" (Honnold, 2005, p. 1).

## References

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