The Beautiful Simplicity of Teen Read Week™

By Sarah Amazing

Despite the fact that for me it feels like it's been only a few years, it's now been almost eight years since I began my career as a teen librarian. I started just after Labor Day, and as anyone who's had to deal with newsletter deadlines and PR schedules knows, six weeks out is usually too late to start planning an event. But even then I knew that we needed to celebrate Teen Read Week (possibly thanks to YALSA member and champion Mary Anne Nichols, my Young Adult Services professor at Kent State), even if details of the event wouldn't make it to the local newspaper and other marketing outlets. In 2007 the theme was LOL @ your library®, and although I was very new and didn't know much about literature or programming, I put together a humorous book display (thanks to the work of the YALSA Popular Paperbacks committee), came up with a passive contest (tell a joke to a staff member for a chance to win a gift card!), planned a board game night, and kicked everything off with my very first (although already established) Teen Advisory Board (TAB) meeting. It went okay—most of the TAB members showed up to tell jokes throughout the week and some books were taken off the display, but only two bored teens already in the library attended the event, mostly because there was food. Still, the week was successful if only because it was the first time in a long time that our library celebrated Teen Read Week, and if it did nothing else, it planted the seed of "Read for the Fun of It!" into the minds of some area teens and our staff.

Since then, we've Skyped with authors, held a variety of contests, put together many displays featuring both the Teen Read Week themes and TAB members' favorites, local author Christopher Barzak (*One for Sorrow*, the upcoming *Wonders of the Invisible World*) visited for a reading, and so on. Some years have taken a great amount of planning and at least some money, whereas other years we've done something simple and just utilized the supplies (and food) in the closet.

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The Beauty of Teen Read Week

To me, that's the beauty of Teen Read Week—how flexible it is. "Read for the Fun of It"—the overarching idea of Teen Read Week—is such a vital concept, and at the core of our mission as teen librarians as we serve the teens in our communities. And although it implies reading, it really is about continuing to seek knowledge outside of school and other responsibilities, simply because it's fun. The *what* is not nearly so important as the simple fact that you're doing it!

That's why Teen Read Week is something that ought to be incorporated into your library event calendar each and every year. The *how* is up to the teens that you work with (with your help, of course). Go big or go small; create something unique each year or host an annual event. Events, displays, social media—everything goes!

Some ideas:

- Bring in an author popular with your teens with the help of your Friends group.
- Ask some teens in your community to create a display of their favorite books.
- Ask your teens what they think "Read for the Fun of It!" means and why it's important to them, then feature their responses throughout the library and on your social media with the Teen Read Week logo.
- Use the 2015 theme of Get Away @ your library and have teens complete a month-long reading challenge and focus on books in other time periods and places, and on those with some sort of epic journey.
- Create a brilliant new program focusing on knowledge and fun—it could be something as simple as a trivia game, where they name a book series after hearing the characters.

Imagine if you held this in a school and pitted their English teachers against your top readers!

- Hold a read-in and offer teens a few dollars off their fines for every hour they read. Nothing says photo-op for a newspaper than a room of frequently rowdy teens reading!

At our library, we use Teen Read Week for an annual fine amnesty program. Teens can have up to $50 waived if they fill out a survey about their library experience. We learn a lot from their responses! (More details at http://yalsa.ala.org/blog/2014/09/10/a-fresh-start/)

Be sure to check out the resources (http://teenreadweek.ning.com/) compiled by the Teen Read Week Committee in the 2015 Teen Read Week Manual and on the YALSA Pinterest board (www.pinterest.com/yalsa/teen-read-week-2015/) for lots of great theme-specific ideas!

Be a Teen Advocate through Teen Read Week

Don't forget to use this week to advocate for your teens and showcase the work YOU are doing. I know teen librarians don't really like to brag, but the powers-that-be and stakeholders in your community ought to see the difference you're making in the lives of local teens, and Teen Read Week is a great time to do it! Sure, your teens love you and are grateful for the work you do, but do their parents understand what they're doing when they spend hours playing Smash Bros with their friends at the library? Show off the Search Institute's Forty Developmental Assets (www.search-institute.org/content/40-developmental-assets-adolescents-ages-12–18) and highlight how many they achieve by being involved at your library. Pull your stats and create a document showing the many events you're hosting, the number of books going out, the number of teens who participate, and local teens' favorite books. Work with your public relations department and send a press release to your local media. Rally around your teens and how awesome they are—you won't regret it.

When YALSA's Teen Read Week Committee brainstormed ideas for the 2015 theme, we really liked the many directions we could go—road trips, time travel, fantasy quests, historical fiction. The major theme is, of course, that ever important journey, and however you choose to celebrate Teen Read Week, I hope you'll remember that just as each and every teen is on a unique journey, so too is every library. Where is yours going? YALS

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