

The Media Center
Reading Promotion in the Age of Technology . . . and Promoting Reading With Technology

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Are the kids reading? Seems like I hear that question a lot these days. Our “yes” answer is especially exciting in a time of digital competition and the expectation that students should acquire reading *skills* and achieve high test scores. We believe that ongoing reading promotion through our school media’s technology program goes a long way toward supporting reading.

Promotion begins by marketing the resources available the media center. Basic technology tools make it easier for us to do a good job without possessing the marketing tools and expertise of a major bookstore. Promoting reading is not just important; it’s fun, and it presents an opportunity for even the least artistic of us to be creative. Here a few simple ideas that can help make a book collection grab the attention of readers, even at the secondary level.

Generate electronic reading lists from your online catalog and use the information in multiple ways. Use these reading lists to create attractive brochures, bookmarks, and signs. There’s no need for “plain vanilla” readings lists when you can do so much with everyday productivity tools. See the sidebar “How Make a Tri-fold-Brochure from Scratch using Microsoft Word,” for example. Or use the built-in Word newsletter templates to create reading lists. Keep copies of brochures and lists printed out and readily available for readers to grab.

Bookmarks can include book titles and pertinent information about the media center, online catalog, or whatever you think is important. The same technique used for a tri-fold brochure can be used to make a four-fold bookmark size brochure. With small enough print there is room for annotations.

Use your media center’s Web site to promote reading; it can be much more than a portal to databases and homework Web sites.

- Post lists of news books, special features, or summer reading lists. We put summer reading suggestions on our Web site this past summer and were pleased to see a relatively high number of hits.
- Turn reading list brochures you’ve made into a PDF file so people can access them off-site.
- Create links to reviews of hot new titles.
- Add links to Web sites that have reading lists. They are easily available on the Web and there are far too many to mention. A favorite of mine is Books in a Series from the Monroe County Indiana Public Library. It’s arranged alphabetically by author, updated often and it’s huge! < <http://www.monroe.lib.in.us/childrens/serieslist.html#contents> >

It's an efficient way to assist students when they ask "what's the next one in this series" or want more titles by the same author.

- Digitize materials created by students or photos of student book projects. Imagine the possibilities!
- Create an online survey. Invite students to vote for their favorite book or author.
- Create an online book recommendation form, which students complete on the Web and submit to you.

Reading promotion via the Web is also a great media program PR tool and a vehicle for reaching parents. The possibilities are limited only by your creativity and ideas.

The Web is full of resources to help you promote reading. They range from the familiar American Library Association. < <http://www.ala.org>. > and Carol Hurst's time-tested Children's Literature Site < <http://www.carolhurst.com/> > to newer resources such as TeachingBooks, a multimedia online service designed to generate enthusiasm for books and reading by providing thousands of author interviews, movies, thematic lists, book guides, links to reviews, and more. A trial subscription is available < <http://www.teachingbooks.net> >

Take things one-step further with the Web by providing e-books for your students. We have not done this yet in our school, but it does appear to be a trend we should not ignore. Minnesota schools have access to over 13,000 e-books through state funding; perhaps your school does, too.

Put your digital camera to work. It's a snap to make reading posters and signs similar to those offered by the American Library Association. Take a photo of a teacher (or other staff member) holding one of their favorite books. Display the signs and posters throughout the media center or school. Take pictures of students reading and display them prominently in the media center and on the Web site; let others know it's cool to read.

Create PowerPoint shows featuring new titles or favorite titles or in support of a theme. Borrow photos of the book cover from the publisher's Web site or Amazon.com. Use the slide show for book talks or set up a self-running kiosk-style slide show on a computer or display it on a media center television. Photos of book covers also work well for displays and in brochures.

Use the school's broadcast system to promote reading events such as Teen Read Week < <http://www.ala.org/ala/yalsa/teenreading/teenreading.htm> > family reading nights, book clubs, or the book fair. Interview staff or students about their favorite books; invite a visiting author to be a guest. Tape student book presentations that they do in their classrooms for future broadcast.

Visit with teachers about reading; share information about the importance of providing time for students to select books and read. Media specialists who were once perceived as book people are now sometimes perceived as technology people. Let staff know that the media program supports both and that reading still matters.

Develop forms that students can use. Ideas include:

1. My favorite book. Have the forms readily available so students can pick them up and fill them in.

2. A reading wish list form. Create a bookmark for students to record the titles of books they want to read
3. A reading log
4. A database. Have students enter their name and favorite title. This is easily shared with others—and it's a great way to teach kids simple database skills.

Use low-tech, inexpensive approaches to jazzing up displays. Visit a bookstore to see what they do; a simple change in how books are displayed can have an impact. If you have multiple copies of a title, stack them together. Attract attention to the display with banners, colorful signs, plants, and three-dimensional objects related to the books. (Sports gear for the sports books; a tiara display for the *Princess Diaries*, etc). We purchase plastic tablecloths, balloons, and party things from a party supply store. A huge Harry Potter balloon welcomes students back to school once year. Regular balloons drew attention to our Teen Read Week displays. We purchase plastic sign holders available from business stores or school supply companies. An investment in display materials is an investment in reading and adds a touch of class that will help entice readers. Be sure to toss the old, dull, unattractive, and fuddy-duddy looking display materials that have been around for ages and make sure signs and displays are age-appropriate.

Rearrange the media center to create reading areas and spaces for display. It's amazing how a little change can make a huge difference; just moving a comfortable chair to a cozy corner with a pile of coffee table size table books along side can be inviting. Display titles face out on the shelves. Move popular titles or subject areas to spots where kids congregate. Stash books inside boxes so students can dig in and find good reading. Since our drawing books go in and out at a rapid pace, they're in a bin on the floor for easy access.

Promoting reading is about using technology to help with collection development.

Use your circulation system's built-in statistics feature to compile lists of the most read or most checked out books. Kids like to read what others read, so keep the lists on display. Sagebrush Accent has a unique "Favorites" tab located on the Web portal(OPAC). The tab displays in real-time the most popular book or most checked out book by students, using real-time data within a district or specific site, depending where the individual is logged in. Once you click on the favorite tab you can then click on the title to see availability of the book, or on the author to see other books by the same author or even on the subject to get information on related subjects.

Work with a vendor or local book store that is computerized (don't assume they all are) so you can get you books within a day or two. Set up an open purchase order so you can pick up items as needed.

Make sure the MARC records you receive include the reading level. The next step is to show teachers and students that this information exists; it's often overlooked.

Use the online collection development services offered by vendors; it will save you hours of time. Vendors typically offer services linking resources to standards and textbooks. Take advantage of this to ensure that the materials meet the reading interests and abilities of our students.

Weed! Collection assessment tools such as Folett's Titlewise (<http://www.titlewave.com>) or Mackin's Collection Analysis plus Solutions Service < <http://www.mackin.com> > make it even easier for you to know which books are dated and are never checked out. Getting rid of the junk makes what you have stand out and look for appealing.

Does all this all seem obvious? Well, observations suggest it's not. Too many media centers appear to be doing nothing to promote reading. Books don't jump off the shelves themselves and students don't always know what they want to read. I've noticed grubby, handmade signage, a lack of displays, or nothing at all to suggest that reading matters and is fun. It's time for a change. Take time to use the tools at your fingertips that can help you do a good job reaching kids and getting them excited about reading!

Mary Alice Anderson is a frequent contributor to professional journals and a conference presenter. In addition to working for Winona Area Public Schools, she is an online adjunct instructor with the Online Professional Development for Educators program in the School of Education at University of Wisconsin—Stout. < <http://www.uwstout.edu/soe/profdev/issues/> > The Winona Middle School Web site can be accessed at <http://www.rschooltoday.com/winonamiddle/>. Communications to the author may be addressed to Mary Alice Anderson, Media Specialist, Winona Middle School, 1570 Homer Road, Winona, MN 55987; e-mail: maryalice.anderson@winona.k12.mn.us, <http://www.rschooltoday.com/winonamiddle/maryaliceanderson/>.

SIDEBAR

How Make a Tri-fold-Brochure from Scratch using Microsoft Word

1. Create an electronic reading list from the online catalog. (35-40 annotated records in size 10 font will fit on both sides of 8.5 X 11 paper.) Sort or organize the records in a logical order.
2. Copy/paste the text from the electronic list into Microsoft Word. (You can also copy/paste records one by one from the online catalog into Word.)
3. Clean up any uneven fonts or spacing if necessary.
4. Choose landscape mode and 3 columns.
5. This allows five columns for text and one column for a classy front cover. (Columns 1-5 are the text; column 6 on page 2 will be the brochure front.)
6. Use your school, media center, or district logo on all brochures, so readers will instantly know these books are in the media center.
7. Add appropriate graphics or photos.
8. Save the layout as a template for future brochures.
9. If color printing is an option, go for it! If not, print at least a few display copies in color.