14. Improving Readers’ Library Skills and Encouraging People to Use the Library

What is the point of improving readers’ library skills?

For readers to benefit from the library, they need experience with using the stock. The more often they come to the library and feel comfortable there, the more they will benefit from the library resources.

_The main goal is to turn your library into a cultural centre, where children will like to go, enjoy, and discover, where EVERYONE is welcome._

- Jana Rohová and Václav Patěk, Sector Leaders, DAPP Malawi

Make imaginative displays

**New-book shelf**

Make sure readers know when any new fiction or information books are given to the library. Display any new books on a separate shelf. Try to make the display look exciting by adding something that is in the title (e.g. a football, if it is about a small girl who starts to play football) as well as the actual book(s).

**Theme shelves**

To attract reluctant readers, you could put some books with similar stories on separate shelves. Popular themes include mystery, murder, and romance.

**Local authors**

Are there any famous writers in your country? Put together a display of their books and a photograph of the author too, if you can find one. Ask local bookshops to help you or, better still, ask the author. If you are lucky, authors may come and visit the library to read from their books or talk about their work.
**Local-language books**
Having a section of local-language books will promote literacy in both English and the local language. In addition to purchasing these books, you can also help readers create books:

- Have students write their own stories.
- Have students interview parents and elders about their life experiences or oral history.
- Invite parents or elders to come to the library to tell a story. Write down the story.

Using any of these suggestions, you can compile the best ones into a book to add to the library stock. You can make it into a contest, if you like. You can also translate baby books into the local language and write the translation into the book. In Lesotho, some of the librarians have students translate children's books into Sesotho, and then they paste the translations into the books or write them directly into the book.

**Using the notice board**
Ask the library club to help you organise a group willing to decorate the notice board regularly. Change the displays two or three times a term. Help find decorations for the notice board. Colourful posters are often available from companies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), visitors, travel shops, hotels, embassies, high commissions, and tourist offices.

**Creating a culture corner**
Help preserve your local culture by creating an area of the library to display items from your community. Keep a table or area to attractively display traditional tools, foods, crafts, clothing, weapons, and household objects that are labelled in your local language and English. In the Botswana primary school libraries, they build a low round wall in a corner of the library to house the culture corner and represent a rondavel. Elders are invited to sit inside and tell stories. Ernest Ankomah, in Ghana, says, ‘The local
traditional chief usually enjoys donating the items in the culture corner of our libraries.’

Figure 14.1. Culture corner in a Botswana library.

**My world**
Newspaper cuttings about the successes of people known to readers could be pinned up. When you read the newspapers or local magazines, look out for information about local families and events in nearby villages or the region. This will help you to encourage people to read and become familiar with the newspaper and magazine stock in the library.

**Theme tables**
A theme table is similar to a culture corner; the difference is that the theme table display should focus on just one aspect of life. Ask the library club to collect pieces of interesting information (e.g. objects, poems, and stories) about one particular subject or theme. Some themes that have proved successful are holidays, homes, the environment, animals, the night sky, town, and village life. Having a display about HIV/AIDS can provide life-saving
information and help students and families who are struggling with discrimination or caring for sick relatives.

Figure 14.2. A poster makes it easy to find the HIV/AIDS display (Lesotho).

**Book reviews**

Encourage readers to write short book reviews in an exercise book. Keep the reviews close to the fiction shelf, where others can read them and see which stories their friends think are interesting to read.

**Organise library events**

Holding special events is an excellent way to encourage readers to make more use of the library and to build support in the community. ‘Carry out a sensitisation campaign in the community so that they see the library as part and parcel of their education,’ says Jabu Simelane, Librarian, Vusweni High, Swaziland. Hold events in the library, such as guest speakers, skits, and musical performances. Once people start coming to the library for any reason, they are likely to come again.
Opening Day/Library Day
Make the opening of the library a big event and invite the community (including chiefs, district school administrators, parents, students, etc.). Then plan to have a Library Day each year to invite the community to celebrate the accomplishments of the year. Here are a few dates you might want to celebrate:

- 21 March: World Poetry Day
- 23 April: World Book and Copyright Day
- 21 June: Short Story Day
- 8 September: International Literacy Day

Story hour
Younger children always enjoy listening to stories. If the story is particularly good, then this can be an excellent activity for secondary school students too. Encourage students to sit themselves comfortably and then read the story to them. You might like to do this under a shady tree or even at night. The librarian should prepare for story hour by reading the book (or chapter) in advance. It is important...
to use your imagination when you read and to try to make the characters come alive: use different-sounding voices when a new person or animal ‘speaks’. If you enjoy singing, there is sure to be a chance for you to sing parts of the story too! Perhaps you can invite another teacher or community leader to read a story and also invite an elder to tell a story. Try using puppets to tell or read the story.

Figure 14.5. Story hour in Lesotho.

**Reading to parents and grandparents**
Ask children to read aloud to adults in the community at a special event or once each week for homework.

**Book club**
Have a weekly or monthly meeting where readers discuss the books they have read. If you have multiple copies of a book, they can all read the same book, which can lead to good discussions. If they all read different books, each reader should briefly review their book in their own words so the others can decide if they want to read it.

**Writing club**
Have a weekly or monthly meeting where library patrons can share their own writing. Encourage a supportive and
encouraging atmosphere where writers give each other suggestions for improvement. Depending on the number of people interested and the length of the stories they are writing, you might want to alternate. For example, at one meeting, you can discuss the writing of a few members, and at the next meeting, the others will have a chance. The writers can leave their work in the library in advance of the meeting so that everyone will have a chance to read it ahead of time. Encourage the writers to submit their best work to the Golden Baobab Prize (www.goldenbaobab.org) or to Short Story Day Africa (www.shortstorydayafrica.org) or to local competitions. If the authors agree, keep the best stories in the library for others to read.

![Figure 14.6. Children read to adults outside a Lesotho library.](image)

**More ideas for school libraries**

A good way to provide practical experience is to use games and projects to explain different ways to find information. This helps students remember library information and it will be fun.

**Why are games and projects useful?**

Games and projects are useful because they help build literacy skills. This increases students’ confidence, which
makes visiting the library more enjoyable for them. Many of the ideas in this chapter can be used for both primary and secondary school students.

First make sure you give students their personalised library tour. There are lots of ideas in chapter 13. The projects and exercises in this chapter are for classwork and teamwork and to encourage individual study. You may find it useful to give the winners a small prize to help encourage students to join in these library activities. If you have access to the Internet, you will find a link to reading games for primary students on this site: www.peggykaye.com (click on ‘games’).

**Art projects**

Incorporating art and literacy into library activities will fully engage students and help them develop their skills and love of learning. A few ideas are listed below, a complete lesson plan is provided in appendix C, and, if you have Internet access, additional lessons from DAPP-Malawi are available on the Library Resources page at www.africanlibraryproject.org. Projects can focus on a specific topic, such as planets, or on a type of writing, such as poems or folktales. Displaying students’ art projects will boost their confidence. When you are doing a project, try to encourage them to use library resources, the supplies you provide (even a pencil and paper is fine if you do not have other art supplies), and their creativity. You can alternate having them work in groups and as individuals. Encourage them to share their knowledge and imagination with their classmates.

**Making and using bookmarks**

The purpose of a bookmark is to help readers remember where they stopped reading. It also encourages people not to spoil books by bending book corners to mark the page they have reached.

Give students pieces of stiff card, cut to about 20 x 5 cm (8 x 2 inches), and ask them to decorate them. You might give a prize for the best one.
Remind students to put their names and class name/number on the bookmark. Any student short of design ideas should be encouraged to draw people, places, a favourite sport, or a popular saying.

**Posters**
Students can make posters of their favourite books to encourage others to read them.

**Mobiles**
Mobiles are a useful way to display information. For instance, if a student is having problems finding out about groundnuts for agricultural or science studies, suggest small groups of students draw a variety of locally grown crops. Then divide the students into pairs or threes and ask them to cut out their pictures. With the librarian’s help, the students then identify which library classification section each picture belongs to. Next ask the students to add the correct classification colour to their picture(s). Finally, make the pictures into a mobile and hang it from a high point in the room. This will give students a quick reminder about where they can find information about agriculture, and will also serve to decorate the library. Mobiles can, of course, be made using pictures from a variety of favourite subject areas.

**Reading activities**

*Presenting a book at school assembly*
From time to time, a student can be allowed to give a brief oral review of a favourite book at assembly. If you reserve this honour for those who have used the library well or who are members of the library club or the book club, it will encourage other students to become involved in the library.

*Start a story*
Ask a student to summarise the first chapter of a story book. (This could be done with several students if they wanted to act it out.) Then hold up the book, so everyone can see what the cover looks like, and ask students to guess how the story ends.
**Top 10**
Grade fiction books into a ‘Top 10’ at the end of term by asking students to vote for their favourite library book.

**Make your own book**
Encourage students to produce their own books. The best ones should be kept in the library for everyone to enjoy reading.

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**TEACHING TIP**
Always remember to check that students understand. Here are two ways to do this:

**Comprehension cards**
You can keep a few multiple-choice question cards that ask questions about a particular fiction book. Although this is a good way for you to find out if the student has understood the story, it is a potentially tedious exercise for the student. It might even make the student start to dislike reading if there is always a test at the end of each book, so use this activity only on an occasional basis.

**Team worksheets**
These can be devised for and answered by small groups of students. The team that finishes first is the winner.

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**Readathon**
This is a fun reading competition. It is most successful with secondary school students and fairly confident readers. The aim is to see how long a class can keep reading a storybook out loud. Students take it in turns to read, each reading one page. Give a prize to the form that reads the most pages. Encourage all competitors to vote for the student who reads in the most interesting way.
**Reading diary**

Have students record the books they read. Check them once a week or once a month, and give a small prize to each student who completes the diary.

**Reading contest**

Have students track the books they read during a school term. Award prizes for the most books read (or the highest number of pages read).

![Figure 14.7. This poster from a library in Ghana shows the results from a read-aloud competition. Students were awarded points in each category: reading with speed, good pronunciation, observation of punctuation, reading aloud (reading loud enough).](image)

**Current events**

Read a short passage or news item from an international magazine such as *Newsweek* or a magazine published in your area. Then ask students to talk about what it means...
for them, their country, and the world. This is especially useful for secondary school students.

**More games to teach library skills**

**Authors game**
Tell everyone in the group to pretend to be an author. First, they can think up a title for their book. Then, on a large piece of paper, help students draw an imaginary book cover for their pretend book, including their own name as the author. Finally, all the students pretend to be books and line themselves up in alphabetical order.

**Jigsaw**
Ask pairs of students to draw large maps of the library, showing where the stock is being kept. Their maps should include fiction, non-fiction, and reference books; magazines; notice boards; etc. When the maps are finished, ask the students to cut them up into 10 large pieces. Each pair then muddles up the pieces and swaps with another pair. Who puts the jigsaw together the fastest?

**General knowledge quiz**
Quizzes are an excellent activity for secondary school students. A library quiz should test students’ knowledge of what is available in the library and develop their library skills. Quizzes encourage students to use a variety of information stock – dictionaries, atlases, magazines, and encyclopædia – as well as rehearse library rules and match up specific subjects with their classification labels.

Set 10 questions, the answers to which can be found in the books and stock in the library. Figure 14.8 shows an example of the sort of questions you might set. Give students two or three weeks to find the answers. Then, when all the students are together, perhaps at assembly or at an end-of-term party, you can announce the names of the students who found all the correct answers. If you have a small prize, then put those names into a container and ask one of the other students to pull out the name of the winner.
• Put these words in the order they appear in the dictionary: excuse, examination, extra, expel.
• What does ‘sustainable’ mean?
• What colour spine label would you find on a book about volcanoes?
• Where are books on beekeeping kept in the library?
• What is the capital city of Vietnam?
• Which countries share a border with Uganda?
• What was the main story in Time magazine? [Put issue number and date – it is fine to substitute any magazine you have.]
• How many players are needed for a rugby union team?
• Looking at the display about turtles [use your own library display], name the nearest turtle nesting beach to the school. [Ask a question that can be answered by looking at the display.]
• What happens if you lose a library book?

Figure 14.8. Sample general knowledge questions for a library quiz.