

## Suggestions & recommendations for Book Drive Organizers from our African Partners

**From the 2024 African Library Partners' Summit  
Migori, Kenya  
March 2024**

**Background:** In the African Library Project's efforts to continuously improve our work, the ALP Monitoring and Evaluation Committee recently surveyed Teacher/Librarians in the countries where we send libraries. The responses were generally appreciative, supportive, and useful. However, to question #14 ("Are the books donated by African Library Project at the appropriate reading levels?") only 52% responded MOST or ALL, which left us wondering how we could do better.

An ideal opportunity to explore this question presented itself at the 2024 African Library Partners' Summit. There, we held a session with our partners to ascertain how better to ensure that the books sent by US Book Drive Organizers are well-suited to the reading level and interest of learners in our Partners' Schools.

At the 1-hour session, attendees offered their answers – on Post-It notes – to these questions, among others. (Partners also offered gratitude and appreciation for the libraries received.)

- What ADVICE or SUGGESTIONS may you offer our Book Drive Organizers about sending books to schools in your country?
- Please name 5-10 TITLES of the most loved, most frequently requested books from your country's schools.

Responses are below, maintaining the language on the post-its.

### Advice to US Book Drive Organizers

- Please try to collect as many books as possible that have People of Colour as main characters: Representation in books and stories is SO necessary for building strong sense of identity.
- **English is usually the main language of instruction at schools but only starting at grade 5, so students would still be struggling to read in English at lower grades. For younger grades, early reader books are encouraged.**
- We encourage Book Drive Organizers to maintain communication with their future library – throughout the Book Drive and afterwards – using the WhatsApp or email that schools provide on their application.
- From Kenya
  - -Send books with local content
  - -Send age-appropriate books
  - -Send level-appropriate books
  - -More pictorials
  - -Various subject-related books
  - -Biographies
- From Lesotho: Have picture books for Primary school as ECD is included in Primary. More biographies.

## **Types of books and specific favorite books**

- Biographies of African leaders and women
  - Books on drugs and moral education are highly desirable.
  - Dr. Seuss series
  - Books on the prevention of gender-based violence
  - Informational (non-fiction) books preferred, especially books focused on health (inclusive of mental health)
  - Nelson Mandela (various books, various authors)
  - Picture books (fiction) with less words are appreciated
  - Science, some history books, social science books, literature books.
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- *Babysitters Club* (Ann M. Martin)
  - *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind* (William Kamkwamba) - suggested by many Partners
  - *Charlie & the Chocolate Factory* and all books by Roald Dahl
  - *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom* (Bill Martin)
  - *The Colors of Us* (Karen Katz)
  - *Every Little Thing* (Bob Marley and Cedella Marley)
  - *Girl Talk* (various authors)
  - *I Am Malala* (Malala Yousafzai, Christina Lamb)
  - *Lady Bird* (books from Great Britain: Check them out on the web)
  - *Little Leaders: Bold Women in Black History* (Vashti Harrison)
  - *Lola at the Library* (Anna McQuin – there are other titles in this series)
  - *The Power of One* (Bruce Courtney - For secondary school students and adults)
  - *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (Mildred D. Taylor & other books by this author)
  - *Sulwe* (Lupita Nyong'o and Vashti Harrison)
  - *Where There Is No Doctor: A Village Health Care Handbook* (David Werner, Carol Thuman, Jane Maxwell)
  - *Who Moved My Cheese?* by Spencer Johnson

## Follow-up notes about English language reading levels:

From the session discussion and from our observations in Ghana and elsewhere, we learned the importance of knowing when English becomes the medium of instruction in each country's schools, since that timing strongly impacts the students' English language reading levels. We hope these learnings will inform Book Drive Organizers' choices of what books to send in their ALP Libraries.

*Additional practical suggestions follow these comments from our Partners.*



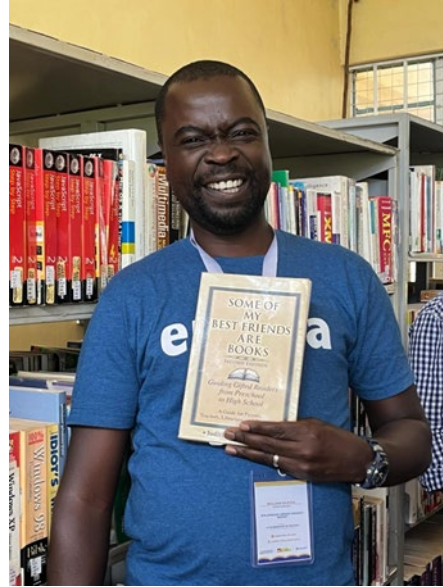
In **Kenya**, primary grades are taught in local languages through Grade 4. Students also learn English as one of their subjects. English becomes the medium of instruction in grade 5, so students would still be struggling to read in English by Grade 5.

**From Malawi (Jessy Mphunda, University of Malawi, with Irene Achayo, Rongo University, Kenya, right):** In all public schools, English is taught as a subject from 1st grade and local language is used as a medium of instruction until grade 4. From Grade 5 that's when English becomes a medium of instruction. However, this is different from private schools, where English is a medium of instruction from grade 1.



**(From Patrick Jafali, Development Aid from People to People):** In Malawi the first four grades are taught in our local language which is Chichewa; however, English is taught in these grades and children are encouraged to read more at an early age.

From **Uganda (William Mukisa, enjuba)**: While there is a general consensus to use the local languages from Preschool to Grade 3, a substantial number of schools (especially in urban areas) use English right from the beginning of Preschool.



In **Ghana**, English is the medium of instruction as soon as children begin school. Local languages (ex., Ga, Dagbane) are taught as elective classes in elementary school



From **Botswana (Ntereke Ngopolang, Ministry of Education and Skills Development, shown center, with Festus Okpora, Alms for All and Michael Lapsley Foundation, Ghana, and Kesaobaka Moloji, also Ministry of Education and Skills Development)**: English is the oral language of instruction PreK on. Starting in grade 2, English is taught, written and books are read by students in English. In grade 1 there is a special class called Breakthrough to Setswana where the mother tongue is studied. Except for exams testing for Breakthrough to Setswana, all exams are in English.

From Lesotho (Monica Letsoha): In Lesotho Public Schools, Primary level mode of communication and teaching should be English but because are from families whose parents speak Sesotho, the teachers find it difficult to teach or communicate in English to children as a result they use both English and Sesotho so that children understand. I do the same thing Saturdays. When we have reading club with children we read English books and explain or comment. I allow the children to speak and do story telling in Sesotho. that way they understand better. Like Jessy said, in Private or English Medium Schools English is 1st mode of teaching and communication.



#### **Practical suggestions for choosing books to send to ALP Libraries**

*To further help U.S. Book Drive Organizers better understand how "appropriate levels" might differ from associated grade levels here in the US, our Country Liaison for Lesotho (and a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer from Lesotho), Kara Howard, offers the following.*

As noted above by our Partners, the first few years of schooling in ALP Partner countries are done in the mother tongue/local language, with the possibility of an English subject class. (Exception: Ghana, where English is the medium of instruction from Grade 1 onward.) That means that most students develop their English literacy skills later in their schooling career.

In that context, here are some tips for how to select books that would be most appropriate for ALP recipient schools and their students:

##### **- If matched with a primary school library,**

- Remember that the oldest students in the school have typically only received two to three years of English instruction.
- Best fit books would be those appropriate for most 1st-3rd grade students in a US context. Even transitional Pre-K books may be appropriate and provide a smooth onramp for new English readers in Grades 4 and 5 in ALP countries.
- Early grade readers, books with text supported by key images, and early chapter books with illustrations will be most accessible to these students.
- If selecting chapter books, aim for ones with short chapters (typically 7 - 12 pages maximum) with at least one or two illustrations per chapter.

##### **- If matched with a secondary school library,**

- Remember that many students are still early on in their English language learning, so books appropriate for a US high school level may be too advanced for most students until their final years of school.
- For most secondary schools, best fit books would be those appropriate for most 4th-10th grade students in the US context.
- Early chapter books with illustrations would still be appropriate, as well as chapter books <250 pages would be most appropriate.
- Books with illustrations are still valued by secondary students, especially those with images that support text meaning making.
- Books typically associated with juniors, seniors, and early college students in the US, can be included, but should not be the majority as they will most likely only be accessible to a small set of students.