

Teen Librarian

Monthly Newsletter

www.teenlibrarian.co.uk



The delayed edition of Teen Librarian Monthly is finally here with a new look and enhanced layout for easy readability. This issue marks the third anniversary of TLM; the original edition was inspired by a CILIP training course on working with Teenagers as a way of helping Librarians who work with Teens to stay in contact. Over the past three years the original 13 subscribers has increased to over 300 and TLM now has readers in France, Germany, the Netherlands, the USA and Lichtenstein as well as in the UK!

This month's newsletter has a focus on Reading Groups and Technology with a look at a new Teen Reading Group in Lancashire, a link to a report on informal learning with digital media, information on an online drawing and animation tool and an online writing project called Blogbook 2009 run by American author Barbara Larmon Failing. We also take a look at two excellent American initiatives that have been running for several years and ask the question as to whether they could be adapted to the UK. The *Eight Questions With...* interview this month is with Rachel Ward, author of the excellent YA novel *Numbers*.

Lancashire TRG

Libraries are still struggling to shake off that fuddy-duddy image and a common image still prevails amongst much of the general public: that you'll be served by a fusty old woman wearing a tweed skirt, you have to be deathly quiet and you'll get a stern lecture if you don't bring your books back on time. Not really the kind of place the average teenager wants to hang out, then. Despite this misconception, it was decided that we would give it a go and try and set up a reading group for teenagers. On suggesting this, I was met with some negative – and probably all too familiar – reactions: 'Oh no, we've tried that, it never works!' being the most common, closely followed by: 'There's nothing *they* want here!' I work in a library in a seaside town with an elderly population; there's very little for young people to do and it often seems that their views aren't taken into consideration. This made it seem all the more important that we should offer them a time when the library would be their own space.

I felt that it was imperative to hold the group out of normal library opening hours so the young people would have time to browse and chat to each other in a relaxed atmosphere. It became apparent that this was a good move at the first meeting when one girl commented: 'It's nice that we can come to the library and don't have to worry about old people tutting and our parents trying to rush us out.' It was difficult to decide what to call the group too as 'book club' and 'reading group' have old-fashioned connotations – I didn't want anyone to think they'd have to sit around discussing 'Wuthering Heights', drinking tea and discussing the state of the nation (unless they wanted to, of course...). I'd heard that the acronym TRG had worked well in other areas of the country – it seemed modern and up-to-date, and, when I asked a few people in the target age-group, they said they liked it.

The most useful piece of advice I was given about recruiting teenagers for the group (and I sought a LOT of advice...) was that I shouldn't intend to grab new library members. Just like an adult book club, the people who are going to be most interested are already readers. Despite issue figures for this demographic being particularly low across the country, they are not non-existent and there's nothing wrong with offering a new service to those who do use libraries anyway. In order to publicise I made an effort to chat to teenagers and their parents when they came to the library, asked if they were interested in joining a reading group and, if they said yes, I asked if I could take their names and addresses. I was then able to send out personal invitations a fortnight or so before the first meeting. Of course, I promoted with posters and leaflets too – and by contacting the librarians at local high schools. I decided to limit the group to pupils in years 7, 8 and 9 – before the stress of exams and coursework kicks in too much.

Once the date for the first meeting was set, it was time to start looking at how the group would be run. It's safe to assume that any teenager who turns up to a library for a reading group is at least a little interested in books meaning that there is likely to be some common ground between the members and a natural starting point for planning activities. For the

first meeting I asked them all to wander round the library and pick out one book they would recommend to a good friend and one they would pick for their worst enemy to read. This generated much discussion (and a now long-standing in-joke about a book entitled 'Scandinavian Glass' which one boy chose for his 'enemy' and then got quite into reading...) I decided that although all the young people are similar in age, their reading abilities were likely to differ far more. I was right: at the first meeting I discovered that one girl still liked to read Daisy Meadows and that one was trying to get through 'War and Peace'. With this in mind I thought it unfair to expect them all to read the same book each month. I know some groups that run like this and it can work but I felt it would isolate some members of my group. Therefore, we keep it to a light discussion about what we have all been reading and what books we would recommend to each other; sometimes I suggest we read books around a certain theme, but I certainly don't insist on it.

We don't always just sit about discussing books either. Some of the things we've done include writing reviews for the County E-zine, re-arranging the teenage section from alphabetical order into genre-specific sections (a nightmare for pin-pointing authors – but great for browsing!) had a general knowledge quiz, ordered pizza, played games, matched book covers to their first paragraphs (who would have thought that a biography of Lorraine Kelly could be confused with 'Winnie the Pooh'?!) It seems that, on the whole, the more structured sessions do work best but sometimes the young people will come up with something far more interesting on their own. One of the most successful sessions involved a pile of children's picture books and a discussion about ones we remembered from being little, what makes a good children's book, whether the words or pictures are more important and when, if and why you stop needing pictures. I'd planned for them to write and illustrate their own stories, which some did (and want to come and read to the pre-school children at storytime) but some asked if they could get into a group and act a story out. What became of that was an extremely dramatic and tremendously funny re-telling of the book 'Biscuit Bear' by Mini Grey – something I don't think I will ever forget!

TRG has been running now for six months and has ten regular members. Every member of the group participates in his or her own way and each one is delight to work with. It's important to have, if possible, another member of staff to help and I'm lucky that I have regular support from the same person – it always helps to have two heads when

planning what to do at meetings too! It's a shame that there often seems to be a fear about engaging young people in projects like this. The media love to portray young people in a negative light: they're all in gangs, they all binge drink and they all beat up old ladies in the street. Yes, I don't doubt that some do, but the majority are good kids and some – shock horror(!) – are actually readers. Some can't wait to pick up the latest Derek Landy story and are desperate to talk to someone about it. TRG meetings are not always easy – even the best-behaved teen is inclined to a little silliness every now and again, but setting up and running the group has been, and still is, a rewarding experience. If you're planning on setting up a group for teenagers, don't expect to be clearing up smashed windows or mopping up after massacres; but do expect it to be a challenge and do be armed with your sense of humour: the worst thing we've had to deal with so far is that, last month, one of the boys used the date stamp off the counter on his own forehead. Hardly tragic. And, on the plus side, at least he'll know when to come back.

Clover Anyon

Digital Youth Research – Kids Informal Learning with Digital Media

The final report of a 3 year project investigating how kids use digital media in their everyday life for self-directed learning and social engagement has now been published.

The full report is available here:

<http://digitalyouth.ischool.berkeley.edu/>, along with the 2 page summary and the press release with its accompanying video.

DoInk

DoInk is a free online drawing and animation tool that runs right in your browser. You can treat it like Microsoft Paint and use it to do just a quick doodle, or take advantage of its layer cloning and vector-based designs to create relatively advanced animations.

DoInk brings two things to the table: a community of talented people and all the tools they need to share their ideas. Once you've signed up, you can begin animating, drawing, and sharing. And to speed things up, you can re-use the work of thousands of other users.

<http://www.doink.com/>

Teen Read Week & Teen Tech Week

Teen Read Week is a national (USA) literacy initiative of the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA), a division of the American Library Association. Started in 1998 it's aimed at teens, their parents, librarians, educators, booksellers and other concerned adults.

Teen Read Week's theme is *Read For The Fun Of It*. Each year, YALSA offers a new sub-theme to serve as a basis for developing programs in schools, public libraries, and bookstores. The 2009 sub-theme is *Read Beyond Reality @ your library*, which encourages teens to read something out of this world for the fun of it.

Teen Tech Week is a national initiative also sponsored by the YALSA. The purpose of the initiative is to ensure that teens are competent and ethical users of technologies, especially those that are offered through libraries such as DVDs, databases, audiobooks, and videogames.

Teen Tech Week encourages teens to use libraries' non-print resources for education and recreation, and to recognize that librarians are qualified, trusted professionals in the field of information technology. Teen Tech Week began in 2007 and has a general theme of *Get Connected @ your library*.

For more information on these events go here: <http://tinyurl.com/ob4qjg> for Teen Read Week, and here: <http://tinyurl.com/5ddz59> for Teen Tech Week.

A possibility for the UK?

I have been speaking to colleagues around the country and a large number of us are already running Reading Groups and special events based around technology (HTML, online gaming, digital content creation etc.) I am not saying that we should only run events and activities during one week of the year, but perhaps a national week to promote our events would heighten public and local authority awareness of the work that we are doing and also encourage more young people to give libraries a try. For librarians that want to start new groups this would also be a good time to attract interested parties. If it becomes an official annual event it may also be possible to encourage authors and publishers of Teen/YA literature to become involved and provide book talks, workshops and promotional materials. It may be a while before the relevant powers will make this a national occurrence but in the meantime I propose a grassroots approach with individual Librarians & Libraries agreeing to set aside a week to specifically promote activities and services to Teens and Young Adults.

Blogbook 2009

Barbara Larmon Failing has initiated an international online teen summer reading project called Blogbook 2009. Beginning June 1, she will publish her never-before published teen novel, Louane Lambert's Lists for Life on its own blog. The book is written as a journal, so each day (for about 2 months), she will post a new entry until the entire novel is on the blog. Teens can interact with the book via their comments.

Schools and libraries can hop on board for this reading adventure by linking their websites to hers where readers can access the blog link. Please visit www.barbaralarmonfailing.com for more information.

When spiders go on the Internet, what do they visit first?

Charlotte's Web site.

Website News

The Teen Librarian website was hacked in early April using Cross Site Scripting (XSS) and frame injection which added links to multiple sites selling t-shirts amongst other things. Fortunately this was picked up within half an hour of it having happened and was fixed by manually reinstalling the entire website from a clean download of Wordpress files. I have also decided to remove the forum from the site due it not being used by Librarians and filling up with spammers. If you are interested in communicating with colleagues across the country there are a number of alternatives including the Teen Librarian Facebook Group: <http://tinyurl.com/teenlibfb>, the Graphic Novels in UK Libraries online discussion Group <http://tinyurl.com/gnlibuk>, Gaming in UK Libraries discussion group <http://tinyurl.com/libgame> as well as the YLG-list <http://tinyurl.com/ylglist>

All submissions of articles, reviews & ideas are welcome and can be sent to teenlibraryservice@gmail.com

Edited by: Matthew Imrie. Articles by: Clover Anyon, Jennifer Price & Matthew Imrie

Eight Questions with... Rachel Ward

Q1. What made you decide to write for Teenagers?

I wanted to write a book that my daughter, then aged 14, would like, and I wanted to write something quite edgy. Once I'd started I really enjoyed it, but by the end I wasn't sure if it was for teenagers or adults.

Q2. How do you get into the heads of your characters?

I don't know – it just happens! I don't know where my characters come from, but once I've got a clear idea of them, it seems to be easy to write from their point of view. Sometimes I realise I'm writing more as me than as them, so I have to watch out for that – it's important to have a consistent voice.

Q3. Do you know instinctively what will appeal to Teens or is it more a hit or miss process?

I've been very lucky with 'Numbers.' I was totally absorbed in the story when I was writing it, and it seems that the idea behind it and the characters do appeal to teen readers. I've had good feedback from adults too, so I think I was lucky enough to stumble across an idea that has fairly broad appeal. I think my publisher, The Chicken House, have a great instinct about what teenagers will enjoy and I really trust their judgement.

Q4. What is the most satisfying part of the writing process for you?

I hope this doesn't sound too starry-eyed, but I love all of it. It's great when you've got ideas buzzing round your head and you can't wait to write them down. I love the day-to-day business of writing – even a few hundred words a day starts to add up to something quite quickly. I even love editing, because you use your original draft as raw material and turn it into something better. I learned a heck of a lot editing 'Numbers.'

Q5. Do you ever read the works of other Teen/YA authors? If yes, what can you recommend?

I hadn't read any other teen/YA authors before I wrote 'Numbers' (apart from Philip Pullman - is he for teens? I think he's for everyone) but I've read some since – I particularly enjoyed books by Theresa Breslin, Marcus Sedgewick, Meg Rossoff and Melvin Burgess. I read *Life, Interrupted* by Damian Kelleher recently and I thought it was fantastic.

Q6. Are any of your novels based on personal experience?

Not directly, in terms of plots or characters, but I'm surprised how much of me gets into my writing. I like writing about places I'm fond of – there's quite a bit about Bath, where I live, in 'Numbers.'

Q7. What are you working on at the moment?

I'm writing a sequel to 'Numbers.' It takes some of the same characters and, I hope, ratchets it up a level. If all goes to plan, it should be out early in 2010.

Q8. Do you ever do Library visits to Teen Reading Groups? If yes, what is the best way to get into contact with you or your agent about it?

I've only just started doing school and library visits, but I'm very happy to do more. I'm hoping to have my own website in the near future, but until then the best way to contact me is through Mary Byrne at The Chicken House (mary.byrne@virgin.net)