

TEEN LIBRARIAN

Monthly

Vol. 2 No. 3 <http://www.teenlibrarian.co.uk/newsletter.htm> March 2007

Editorial

We are almost finished with the first quarter of this year! Fortunately Teen Librarian Monthly is here to help keep things sane. This month's newsletter takes a brief look at Tokyopop's new ratings system which should make life easier for librarians that are new to manga or unsure of what may be appropriate for the age groups they are buying for. There is also a potentially controversial piece on Teen Consultation, the author of which has asked to remain anonymous as the views in the piece may invite comment – if comments are forthcoming may I invite you to use the Forum on the website <http://www.teenlibrarian.co.uk/forum/> as at the moment it is very quiet.

On a lighter note there is also a piece on the imaginative use of *Dance Dance Revolution* to resolve fines and end disputes within the library. Dudley Borough has put a positive spin on the use of graffiti and there are some examples of non-pink books for girls and some links that lead to some interesting articles if anyone has a few minutes. The interview this month is with Joe Craig - author of the Jimmy Coates series.

Tokyopop revises Ratings System

As part of its 10th Anniversary celebration Tokyopop is instituting a new, more comprehensive rating system for its graphic novel releases, "A" for All Ages, "Y" for 10+, "T" for 13+, OT for 16+, and "M" for 18+.

Where in the past the only information on a book's cover in addition to the age rating was the parental advisory on shrink-wrapped 18+ titles, under the new system Tokyopop will be indicating what content factors were involved in the book's age rating. Tokyopop will institute the new rating system beginning in the autumn of 2007. Follow this link to download a comprehensive flyer on the new ratings system: http://www.tokyopop.com/news/rating_flyer.pdf

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Consultation with Caution

One of the buzz words in library services for teenagers is consultation. Many would argue that it is so important that it should underpin everything Teen Librarians should do. I wouldn't disagree, after all we are here to serve and who better to tell us what we should be doing than our customers. However, there may be substantial problems in the way we've been listening. A lot of consultation based projects such as Destination Unknown have been making some bold statements lately. Very few of the projects out there though have really tried to analyse teenagers as consultation subjects and very much give the impression that what teenagers tell us should be accepted at face value.

In undertaking a significant research project to look at how teenagers behave as consultation subjects (in relation to stock selection and collection development), the following general points became clear and might be of interest to

those thinking of consulting in the near future.

- Many consultations rely heavily on teenagers already inclined to use libraries. This is fine to a degree, but the untrained ear might miss the fact that these teenagers are already biased towards some of the more traditional elements of the library and might have pre-conceptions about what is or is not suitable.
- Most qualitative consultations do little to reconcile the views of their subjects with those of a broader cross section of the teenage community. Issuing a questionnaire survey through schools and producing a quantitative analysis with software like SPSS can be a real boon in producing a community profile from several hundred kids against which the responses of interview subjects can be scrutinised. This may help you identify aspects of individual responses that are particularly personalised and non-typical or representative of local teenagers.
- Many consultations miss the opportunity to anchor their responses in reality. The responses of teenagers talking about stock when faced with a wide range of new books as stimuli were exceedingly different from the responses seen elsewhere when teenagers indicate the kind of books they would like, unaware of what is really available. Make sure your consultation is anchored with stimuli and physical examples of what might realistically be available without introducing unfair bias into the results.
- Other consultations seem to be too forceful and examples

were found around the country that forbade subjects from selecting adult stock or monitored behaviour in such a way that it shaped the results of the consultation.

Caution about these points may well help your consultation attain some realistic and useful results. Although some consultations may justify the ongoing funding of teenage projects, the above points might additionally justify the argument for professional involvement in these projects, indicating that Librarians trained in research techniques and analysis are best suited to really understanding teenagers, going beyond face value acceptance to get to the heart of what the consultees really mean. *anon.*

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Using Dance Dance Revolution in Libraries

A Teen Librarian in Kansas is using Dance Dance Revolution to settle disputes among patrons and to adjust the fines they pay:

For example, if a teen has overdue books, she will dance-off against the person, and if the teen wins, the librarian will waive the fines.

In addition, when the kids get into squabbles amongst themselves, she tells them to take it to the mat and dance off against each other.

DDR (also known as *Dancing Stage* in Europe) is a music video game series produced by Konami. It is available on PlayStation consoles, Windows PCs and Xbox systems (and a number of other systems).



How to play:

The game is played on a dance pad with four arrow panels: left, down, up, and right, or 6 arrows (the 4 main directions plus right and left diagonal panels, known as solo mode). These panels are pressed using the player's feet, in response to arrows that appear on the screen in front of the player. The arrows are synchronized to the general rhythm or beat of a chosen song, and success is dependent on the player's ability to time and position his or her steps accordingly. *

What's a man eating monster's favourite book?

Ghouliver's Travels. *

Dudley Wood Library Graffiti Project

Young people from across the Dudley Borough have been undertaking graffiti workshops as part of a detached youth work project.

Their final project was to decorate the shutters at Dudley Wood library. The group worked on the design over a period of 6 weeks with Dave Bassinder, a professional graffiti artist. The actual painting and varnishing took 2 days.

This is one of a series of projects which Dudley libraries have worked on in partnership with Youth and Community Services to encourage and attract teenagers to use the Borough's library services and to raise awareness of the many free services and materials that libraries have to offer to this target group including.

- Teenage Book Buying
 - o Groups of teenagers bought collections of books currently in stock at 13 libraries

and which will also be made available on the Cyber Buses.

- Teen Magazine Collections
 - o Teens suggested appropriate titles which are available at all 18 borough libraries – then on the Cyber Bus. Magazines include Bliss, Elle Girl, Girl Talk, Match, Max Power, Shoot, Shout, Simpsons, Sugar, Top of the Pops and Vibe.

The project links to Priority 2 of the Community Safety Strategy to support personal development of young people and also supports Priorities in the Community Safety Plan, for which teenagers are a target group for libraries and fulfil more than one of the key aims in the Directorate of Education & Lifelong Learning Strategic Plan.

You can see the finished. Graffiti project on page 5. dt *

Pop Culture news: The return of Buffy the Vampire Slayer

On March 14, "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" returned in comic book form.

Joss Whedon, "Buffy's" – creator, has written the first five issues and will oversee — or “executive produce,” he says — the whole arc as if it were a television show. Whedon has enlisted former “Buffy” staff writers, along with a few writers from the comic book world, to join him in continuing the story, which is scheduled to run for at least 30 issues to be released monthly. Whedon, the show's fans and the series' publisher, Dark Horse Comics, have deemed it “Buffy Season Eight.” *

No Pink included

Following on from last months Pink special I was reminded that there is more to positive books for girls than a plethora of pink. There are just so many great books out there here are some ideas:

Parable of the Sower by Octavia Butler (And it has a blue cover!) Not sure why Octavia Butler isn't better known – her books are great. In this Lauren Olamina is an African-American teenager living in a gated community in the near future. Society is falling apart due to climate change and there is a break down of law and order. She has to escape when gangs break into their compound. She has her own vision of human destiny and (kind of) invents a new religion. This is a scary and well written futuristic novel with a very strong black female teenage protagonist.

While we're doing futuristic ***Siberia by Ann Hallam*** is very popular with my teenage borrowers. Another strong heroine in a bleak, futuristic world – Sloe is the daughter of an exiled (female!) scientist; she has to travel on a terrifying journey with a case containing the "seeds" or genetic codes of animals. The animals are really endearing when they hatch to help her, and it's very well written and gripping.

The Stephanie Plum series (One for the Money, Two for the dough etc) ***by Janet Evanovich*** stars Stephanie as a donut-addicted bounty hunter. These are very funny and have a cast of eccentric characters including Stephanie's grandma (who has

secret ambitions to be a bounty hunter as well) cop Joe Morelli and the glamorous, dangerous Ranger. Set in New Jersey and written for adults, these are hugely popular and much less fluffy than they seem at first glance. Bad Kitty by Michele Jaffe is similar and for a younger audience – smart and very funny. jm

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Links

Be in the Know: A guide for practitioners working with young people - 2007-08
<http://www.info4local.gov.uk/documents/publications/95384>

School Admissions Code 2007
<http://www.info4local.gov.uk/documents/publications/95412>

Education Maintenance Allowance: Get in the know 2007-08
<http://www.info4local.gov.uk/documents/publications/95396>

A Guide to Financial Support for Higher Education Students in 2007-08
<http://www.info4local.gov.uk/documents/publications/95404>

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Submissions

If anyone would like to submit an article or idea for inclusion in the newsletter, please send it to editor@teenlibrarian.co.uk

Editor: Matthew Imrie

Contributors: anon., Donna Taylor, Jane McCarthy & Matthew Imrie

Special thanks to Joe Craig for giving up his time to answer the eight questions.

The finished result with Rosalind Cutler and Cheryl Mills, library assistants at Dudley Wood library



Eight Questions with... Joe Craig

Q1. What made you decide to write for Teenagers?

I don't think I ever really did. I just set out to write the story that I had in my head the best way that I thought it could be told. I wasn't thinking about aiming it at any target audience except for one person – myself. I still write the same way. That is, aiming to write the story that would get me excited if I started reading it. I'm a very impatient reader, so I know that if the story's good enough to keep me gripped, I'm going in the right direction.

Of course, I'm delighted that my books have found an audience with teenagers, as well other people from all different age groups.

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

I start off by forcing myself to think unbelievably hard, to imagine myself in whatever situation my character is in. Then sometimes I try to respond instinctively, by shouting lines out aloud at myself and seeing how I react. (This is when my girlfriend starts to worry about me, but I get a more honest reaction out of myself this way.)

So my first reference point is always myself. But not all my characters are like me, so then I have to take the harder step of remembering human behaviour that I've observed. I need to really focus on times when I've met people who are like whichever character I'm working on. Then I might do some more shouting, because that's quite fun.

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

I have no idea what will appeal to anybody else – but I don't believe it's a hit or miss process, because I know for certain what will appeal to me. As I've mentioned, I write everything aimed only at myself as a reader. I would never try to guess what other people wanted – teenagers or anybody else. I think some writers do, and even if the books turn out well, you can always tell that they're writing what they think somebody else will like. I find it patronising to read that, so I don't ever presume to know what other people like.

It might sound selfish to say that I only write for myself, but it means that I have to tell the story in a way that keeps me excited. It has to come from the heart, and I think that makes any story tighter, sharper, more honest, and more dynamic.

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

Each stage is satisfying in different ways, but I think the most exciting moment is when I've been working on the plotting for ages, and there's one little problem that I can't work out. Then I'll suddenly have a revelation that sends me rushing to my notebooks. I find that I can't take notes quickly enough to keep up with my thoughts. The whole story opens up, and this new way of looking at it sends me off in unexpected directions, with more and more twists and ideas coming faster and faster.

When I think about the new ideas I get really excited and can't wait to start writing a first draft. When I'm really itching to get to the computer

to start typing, that's when I say to myself, 'This could be good'.

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

I like to keep an eye on other books that are out there, and I try to keep up to date with what teenagers are reading. When I do story workshops in schools and libraries, it's essential that I've read some of the same stories as my audience, or I at least know what the references are.

To be honest, I find that I'm disappointed by YA books far more often than I am excited. The last new children's book I really enjoyed was 'Varjak Paw', by SF Said, which is for a slightly younger audience. I also enjoyed the sequel, 'The Outlaw Varjak Paw'. Imagine 'The Matrix' but with cats, and you'll be nearly there.

Of course, I've also read and enjoyed the Alex Rider books and the Cherub books, because they're in the same sort of genre as my books. But I try not to pay attention to them too closely because I don't want to imitate anybody else's books. I want to write my own!

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

I think my family would be worried about me if I claimed that I was on the run from the Secret Services, or that I've flown a helicopter along the Thames, or that I've driven a Bentley along the tracks of the Victoria line.

I do sometimes draw on my own experiences as a starting point, though – especially for the settings of certain scenes. I like to use places I've been, or parts of the world I know well. For example, in my first book, parts of North London are

featured, and that's where I grew up (and still live, in fact). Then I set part of the second book in a small French village in Normandy where I went on holiday when I was about 8.

Q7. What are you working on at the moment?

Various things!

Mainly, the fourth Jimmy Coates book. It's due out in October 2007. ('Jimmy Coates: Killer' and 'Jimmy Coates: Target' are out already, 'Jimmy Coates: Revenge' will be published in February, and the title of the fourth book is still a secret.)

I'm also working on a picture book, a couple of TV projects, and developing my own brand of chili sauce. It'll probably be a while before any of those last three projects come to fruition, but in the meantime I'm always making notes for future novels, and writing new songs, which I hope to record at some point in 2007.

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

Yes. I try to do as many visits to schools and libraries as I can. I really enjoy it. The best way to arrange a visit is to email me directly, on joe@jocraig.co.uk