

PHC Invests in New Audiences for the Humanities

“PHC can play an important role in helping young people develop an awareness of how the humanities reach every corner of our lives. Working with them is our opportunity to deliver civility and culture to the world they will create.”

— Mary Garm, Administrator of the Lackawanna County Library System and PHC Board Member on the importance of Teen Reading Lounge

In 2011, PHC pilots Teen Reading Lounge (TRL) in six public libraries across the state. This comes after a year of program research and development with advisors and experts in teen programming, education and library services.

Crafted for tweens and teens ages 12-18, TRL focuses on fantasy fiction and graphic novels — two genres of growing interest to young adults. Through discussion and interactive workshops, TRL is designed to promote the joy of reading outside of the classroom and to give teens an opportunity to discuss big ideas important to their lives.

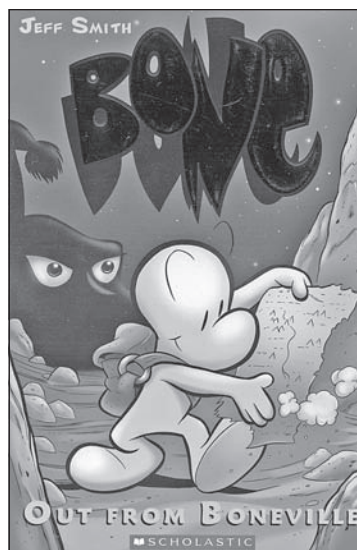
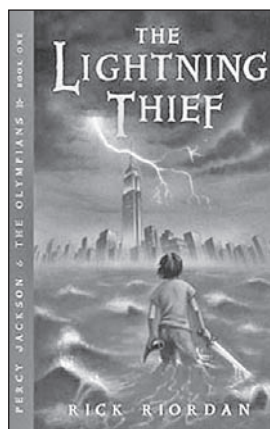
This is the first time PHC has created humanities programming exclusively for younger audiences. With this pilot, PHC hopes to increase the capacity of librarians to conduct public humanities programming for teen audiences and to introduce teen audiences to the value of the arts and humanities.

PHC spoke with two librarians participating in the pilot: **Penny Talbert**, Executive Director of Ephrata Public Library and **Kelly Rottmund**, Young Adult Librarian at Sewickley Public Library of the Quaker Valley School District. The two libraries have been serving teens for a combined total of 17 years.

What attracted you to teen services?

PT: When I first started working at the library, my director sent me to a workshop by Patrick Jones (YA author and former teen librarian). As soon as I got back to my library, I started making changes. I moved the YA section to the front of the library and put together a teen advisory council. I started visiting the schools and found that there was a great need for teen activities outside the school. I love working with teens because I feel like I can really make a difference. I wish I had that when I was growing up. Being a teenager is tough — and if I can guide them in the right direction now, they will be library users for life!

KR: I was attracted to teen services because teens have a unique view of the world and I wanted to hear, see and share that perspective. Also, I enjoy teen fiction much more than adult fiction!



Why is it important for libraries to invest in teen services?

PT: Teens need to have role models in their community. They need a safe place to get together and hang out with their friends. And they need a place that fosters their interest in literature. The library is, in my opinion, the only place that offers all three of these things. And let's not forget — teens are teens for a short time. After that, they become voters. The support we foster in them now will pay off in the future when they are at the polls.

KR: So often I have heard from teens that the community doesn't care about them or their interests. They feel invisible to the adults they encounter every day. Teen services are a way to engage teens and make them feel welcome and valued, not only in the library but also in the community. Teen programs provide a place for teens from different social circles but who have a shared interest to come together and interact.

What kind of programming does your library offer teens?

PT: We have programs for teens and give them a place to hang out. We also offer mentoring for their graduation projects and community service. In addition, we spend time on their turf — in the schools. I visit and do book talks at least twice a year and visit right before the end of school for summer reading. We are lucky to have a great relationship with our school librarians. We work together on grants, author visits and offering teens a variety of opportunities in school and the public library. Of course, our library is known for duct taping teens to the wall for a living art exhibit to bring attention to a county referendum several years ago! We were named Most Valuable Program that year by VOYA (Voice of Youth Advocates Magazine). That was a great way for us to get recognition from our peers but, frankly, the teens never cared. They just want to be a part of the library.

KR: Some of our programs occur weekly (e.g., Anime Club), while others take place only once a month (e.g., Teen Book Club, Teen Movies, Dungeons & Dragons). We do a lot of craft-based programs (e.g., DIY Disco Balls and Paint Chip Wallets) and usually host one food-themed program per month. We have done Cook the Books where we make a food item found in a teen book, Cupcake Decorating and Cheese-alicious Night. Teens also volunteer in the Children and Teen Departments.

What advice you can offer libraries that are new to serving teens?

PT: Starting a teen program is a slow process, and it can be very disappointing if you are hoping for throngs of teenagers at the doors. My advice would be to target your efforts at 8th and 9th graders so you can cultivate the relationship for several years. There is no right or wrong kind of program — you have to look at your community. What works for me may be a disaster somewhere else. I'd also suggest getting social media accounts and using them daily. And finally, be transparent. Be yourself, and they'll appreciate it!

KR: Teen advisory groups and surveys are very important when getting started! Just because a program sounds cool and was successful at another library doesn't mean the teens in your area will be interested. Don't be discouraged or give up too quickly. It takes a long time to build relationships with teens. Also, teens are ridiculously busy. Make sure you know what other afterschool activities are happening in your area and plan around them. Eventually, when the teens trust you and feel like the library has something to offer them, they will spread the word. They are your best advertisers!



Do you know a teen who would enjoy the TRL program? Contact one of the six participating libraries to see how s/he can get involved.

- Ephrata Public Library (Lancaster County)
- Grove City Community Library (Mercer County)
- Haverford Township Free Library (Delaware County)
- Hazleton Area Public Library (Luzerne County)
- Plum Borough Community Library (Allegheny County)
- Sewickley Public Library (Allegheny County)

For more information on TRL, contact Jennifer Danifo at jdanifo@pahumanities.org.

