

Teen Read | JSYK: PHC Explores Youth Programming with New Book Program for Teens

(Teen-speak translation: JSYK = just so you know)

“The Harry Potter books were popular not mainly because of this wonderful story and the language, I don’t think, but because it was this huge phenomenon that allowed young people to participate in it. What was exciting was reading what your friends were reading and talking to them about it. People of all ages are hungry for that kind of community.”—Timothy Shanahan, past president of the International Reading Association (“The Grim Read,” *Poets & Writers Magazine*, March/April 2008)



After almost 10 years of success with Read About It!, a reading and discussion program for adults, PHC is developing literary programming for teens. This new programming direction addresses two goals: to engage youth in the humanities through the reading and discussion of popular books and special hands-on projects, and to help strengthen the capacity of public libraries across the state to serve this diverse age group.

The development of this new teen program comes in response to a survey PHC conducted in the summer of 2009 with library leaders. We asked the library community to identify audiences they would like to better serve in their communities and teens came out on top. The individuals surveyed also named fantasy fiction and comics as genres of interest to this age group.

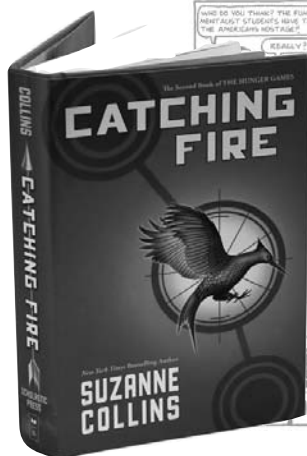
Libraries across the country recognize the importance in serving younger audiences. The Young Adult Library Services Association is the fastest growing division of the American Library Association.

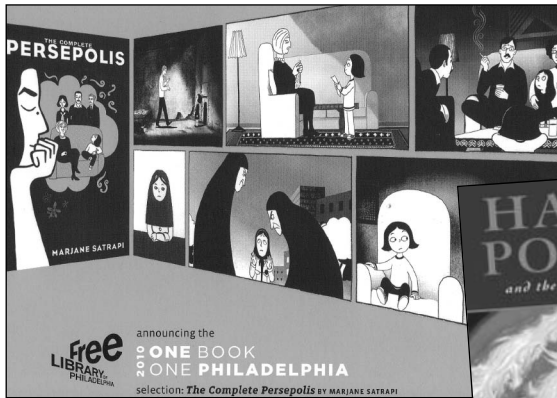
According to the ALA website, current membership is more than 5,500, a 76% increase from 2000—a sign that reaching teens is becoming a priority. The teen book website Teenreads.com surveyed literary teens ages 18 or younger and found that 44% visit their local libraries at least once a week and 37% visit at least once a month. (“What Do Teens Want?” Carol Fitzgerald, *Publishers Weekly*, 10/26/09.)

Professionals in the education field also know that fostering reading among teens and including them in the arts and humanities has big consequences. Teens do better in school, develop critical thinking skills, become more active community members and grow into engaged consumers of art and culture if reading is encouraged. (See NEA’s study “To Read or Not to Read: A Question of National Consequence,” November 2007 for more information.)

In anticipation of this new programming endeavor, PHC collaborated with the Office of Commonwealth Libraries to consult with a multidisciplinary advisory group of teen/young adult experts. The Teen Programming Advisory Group included youth services librarians, educators and artists from across the state:

- Susan Campbell Bartoletti (Children’s Author)
- Karen Brooks-Reese (Teen Services Coordinator, Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh and Pittsburgh District Library Center)
- Shirley Brown (On-line Events Coordinator, Philadelphia Chapter of the National Writing Project)
- Molly Carroll (Young Adult Coordinator, Radnor Library)
- Valerie Harris (Director, Teen Writer’s Academy)
- Gail Jones (Visual Artist and Arts Educator)
- Neil Kleinman (Professor, College of Media and Communications, The University of the Arts)
- Denise Mancuso (Middle School Librarian, Big Spring Middle School)
- Leslie Stillings (Head, Youth Services, Pottstown Public Library)
- Steven Herb (Director, PA Center for the Book, Penn State University)
- Jamie Kaspar (Fine Arts and Humanities Advisor, Bureau of Training and Learning Support, Division of Standards and Curriculum at the Pennsylvania Department of Education)



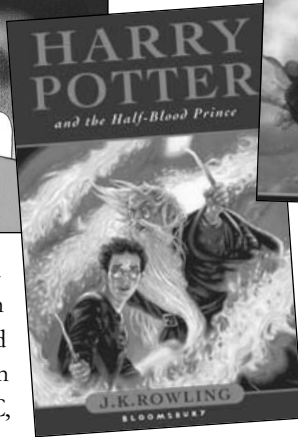
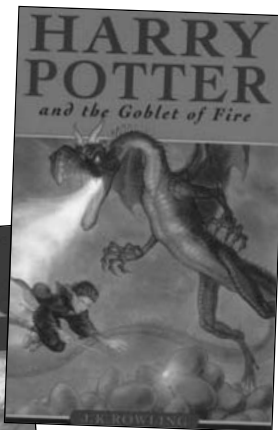


The advisory group met on October 29th at the Office of the Commonwealth Libraries in Harrisburg and discussed many issues, the most important of which was learning outcomes, i.e., what does PHC, and partnering libraries, want teens to get out of the program. Once that critical framework is in place, the group advised that the program include three features to increase participation: a contemporary “menu” of books from which teens can choose, a trusted advisor overseeing the groups to address questions and big issues, and a hands-on component designed exclusively by teens. The group also suggested media and gaming tie-ins and brainstormed marketing strategies to help libraries attract teens.

Despite the fear that teens have stopped reading, the publishing industry tells a different story. Although adult book sales are down, teen and young adult literature is booming. According to *Publishers Weekly/PR Book Sales Index*, sales in these categories will increase as much as 5.1%, especially in the fiction/fantasy/science fiction genres, where an approximate 13% growth is expected over the next year. (“What Do Teens Want?” *Publishers Weekly*, 10/26/09.)

Most popular are books with exciting plots and stories that address the issues that teens are facing today. Despite their fantastic roots, the *Twilight* and *Harry Potter* series connect with young readers because the books explore themes topical to young readers, themes like the heartbreak of a first love or feeling like an outsider among friends and family. Graphic novels like Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis* are popular with teens for the author’s unique take on coming-of-age. (Satrapi grew up in Iran during the often violent revolution.)

Tie-ins to film or TV are important draws as well. In November 2009, the movie version of *New Moon*, Stephanie Meyer’s sequel to *Twilight*, placed third on the all-time domestic chart behind



last year’s \$158.4 million opening weekend for the Batman blockbuster *The Dark Knight* and 2007’s \$151.1 million haul for *Spider-Man 3* (*Associated Press*). Teens are consuming and

shaping popular culture at an alarming rate. **Why not bring them together to discuss it?**

Over the last three decades, PHC has been a leader in making the humanities accessible to every Pennsylvanian, but there are gaps in successful and sustainable programming for ages 12-18. PHC has the opportunity to be a leader in introducing this age group to the study of the humanities, an area that at its core is about our most meaningful journeys and what it means to be human—pretty powerful stuff for an age group searching for their own, unique identity.

PHC will pilot the new programs in spring 2011 and make the programs available to the wider library community starting in fall 2011 and spring 2012. Program development activities are supported by the Institute of Museum and Library Services under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act as administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Education’s Office of Commonwealth Libraries.

Tell Us What Your Teens Are Reading!

You can be a part of the development of PHC’s new programming for teens! What are your teens reading at home? What books can’t they put down? What books do they want to talk about? Better yet, have your teen tell us what they’re reading! E-mail your suggestions to Read About It! Coordinator, Jennifer Miller, at jmiller@pahumanities.org. Jennifer can answer questions about program development, funding opportunities and vampires.