

Excerpt from a training manual for librarians in the southern region as part of an NCERT workshop in January 2008. Usha Mukunda.

## **Chapter 8. Inculcating and enhancing the reading habit**

“Reading is not a duty and has consequently no business to be made disagreeable.”

Augustine Birrell. (Essayist)

### **INTRODUCTION**

The library is a responsive entity. With the best of collections, infrastructure and even services, it can spring to life only at the magic touch of the users. At the same time there is much that the librarian can do to ensure that every book has its reader and every reader her book. The first thing that the management and librarian must do is to have open access, both in terms of keeping the library open during break times and even a little after school hours. Children’s attention span is short and if there are other activities that are available while the library remains closed, they will lose the habit of coming to the library as one of their major options. So the library needs to match and excel over other attractions to ensure use of the place. Secondly, there must be at least one weekly library period for every class. This is a time when the librarian can plan and conduct activities and interactions and must not be used for home work.

In this chapter we will look at the urgent need to encourage reading and the multiple ways in which this can be done.

At a young age, children learn from their immediate environment through their senses. After they reach the stage when they can read, their learning takes a quantum leap with access to books and other reading material from diverse sources. Suddenly their world expands to match their growing curiosity. This is when the window opens for the adults in a child’s life to start them off on a life-long relationship with books. In the present context, young people are becoming more and more enamoured and even addicted to the media, the internet, and software consisting of games and animation, to meet their needs for information and entertainment. With the dazzling advances in technology and the alluring diversity of the media, is it any wonder that a young

person's fancy turns more readily to such attractions than to books? As educators and librarians, there is much we can do to redress this imbalance. The first thing is to recognize and acknowledge the benefits of each of these modes of learning. From there we can make out a special case for reading as a unique learning tool. Reading includes the act of reading the words, comprehending them and what is vital, being discriminating about what is being read. There is reading for reference and information, for awareness of global issues, and for personal development. Reading also leads to contribution to society, to sensitization of the mind and to empowerment through knowledge. Therefore, reading must become a daily activity, a regular part of our lives.

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

While discussing reading, we must remember that it covers a broad spectrum, all the way from reading road signs, instructions and newspapers to books of deeper content, and now, reading online as well. At the school library, children can be exposed to reading of posters, signs, a map of the library, notices and announcements on the display board etc, all of which lay the ground for wider reading to come.

At the most basic level, reading improves comprehension and stretches the vocabulary. It widens the knowledge base and instills confidence. Symbolic writing informs and conveys, while rhetorical writing inspires and stimulates. Written language has an enduring quality that cannot easily be replaced. It is like being in conversation with the finest minds over centuries. This personal and direct contact is invaluable and incalculable. Reading raises questions, sparks off ideas and starts a chain of imaginative thought. It is an education in itself and it is vital that we as librarians recognize this and support the school curriculum in diverse ways to inculcate and enhance the reading habit. Reading as a skill is taught by the teacher. Helping children to build on this skill and discover the art of reading is the librarian's privilege and responsibility.

When children read, there is a relationship which begins between them and books. It is a life-long bond, in which the reader has the freedom and the leisure to explore the written word at his or her own pace, with breaks, at any place and in any position! As children grow in discernment,

they begin to appreciate the beauty of language and expression. They are able to pick up and enjoy subtleties in style and the nuances of the writing. Children, who are good readers and read widely, can express themselves more clearly in writing. As they grow older, they learn and absorb a good deal more, faster and with more lasting effect. By the simple act of reading, young people are expanding and enhancing their sensibilities. They are exposed to strong themes of war, violence, racism, bias, prejudice, injustice and discrimination. They realize that such issues are not so distant from their own lives or of those around them. They are sensitized to issues of gender, poverty, disabilities, natural disasters and selflessness through simple stories without heavy moralizing. The wonders of nature are revealed to them through books and tales which will make them more aware of the natural life around them. Myths and legends, which were passed down by oral tradition are now available to them as stories. History comes alive in well told narrations. Biographies of great people are inspiring and bring these figures to a human level. Thus through the creative art of a few, many others benefit and learn by sharing that experience through reading.

From a young age, encouraging children to read both fiction and non-fiction helps them to grapple with concepts, ideas and processes. Over a period of time, they are able to discern between fact and opinion. These abilities will benefit them as they grow into adults to make sense of the world and respond rightly. Children who read widely and critically are unlikely to become pawns of divisive forces. They are articulate and clear about issues of daily life. In this way, they grow into thoughtful citizens and contribute to a meaningful society. So there is the growth of a confident, thinking individual who can contribute intelligently to the society and the nation. We have seen that children who read regularly from a young age face examinations with more assurance. Their performance too is better. As they grow into adults, this strong reading foundation stands them in good stead.

Recently when I was talking to a group of 9 and 10 year olds in the library, I asked them, “What is your reason for reading? Their answers came quickly. “To improve spelling.” “To know more.” “To learn new words.” Suddenly one child blurted out, “For fun!” The whole group echoed him, “yes, me too, me too!” So we need to be aware of the aspect of enjoyment in reading and respond to that too.

Like any physical activity, regular reading builds the stamina to read faster, assimilate more easily, and to read for longer periods. Children who are good readers can pick up connections, allusions and quotations which come up in conversations or in other writing. This increases their self-esteem and makes them confident of taking on any assignment with independence. However convenient we may find it to treat students as a composite group, the fact remains that they learn as individuals. Their pace of learning is different, their patterns and styles of learning are different. Therefore the informal learning and growth of confidence in doing self-study cannot be over emphasized. It is clear that self- study and self-learning are other skills which go along with good reading habits for all this to happen, reading remains the key factor.

The skill of searching for and finding relevant information is best developed in the library with the help of the librarian. Simulation exercises and step- by- step searching techniques must be taught from a young age.

Young people who read regularly feel connected with the world at large. They learn about other lands, people and cultures, and are no longer inhibited or bound by their immediate environment...Books can also take the place of companions in times of trouble and there are well-known instances of people who read extensively while they were in prison. Jawaharlal Nehru and Nelson Mandela are just two such examples.

Books can bring about a sea change in people. At a young age many who read biographies or philosophical and spiritual literature make a lifetime commitment to a cause. However, this can also be dangerous when indoctrination takes place through reading inciting material. Therefore, the adult who is in contact with the young person must always be alert and aware of reading patterns and pre-empt such tendencies quickly. By exposing the child to what is in itself excellent, you can be sure that she will develop standards of excellence of her own.

In a talk recently delivered by a senior librarian, I heard an amusing reason for reading. He said, "The book is portable. Carry it around and your reputation is set!"

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF READING FOR TEACHERS, MANAGEMENT, LIBRARIAN AND PARENTS.**

In a school the users are primarily the teachers, either directly or indirectly, because through them, the students are initiated into becoming lifetime users. Naturally it is very important that teachers must read too.

First, teachers must read to understand their subject in depth and breadth. The teacher who is limited to the text book will soon get overtaken, even by the student. Remember the story of Albert Einstein at school? His teachers punished him for asking questions that they were unable to answer! Also, teachers must read to understand how their subject fits into the overall curriculum. If, as teachers, they are part of curriculum meetings, they need to be clear what the issues are. Next, they must read to enhance their teaching and communication methods – books on classroom management, current approaches and innovative techniques. Lastly, they must read and be up- to -date to recognize and understand a particular child's learning difficulties – physical or psychological.

So when a teacher comes to you for help in sourcing ideas and material for a project, integrates a lesson with library use, or for material on learning disabilities, you know you are making the right impact on your user community.

An enlightened management which is aware of the unique place of the library in the school structure can work wonders to facilitate the blossoming of the library and the librarian! They must provide opportunities for the librarian to attend library-related workshops, talks and meetings. This will increase the librarian's knowledge base and self- confidence. He/she can keep abreast of the current state of the art in libraries, books and technology. A keen eye and a sharp memory for books, even if he/she has not read them all is an invaluable asset for the librarian. The growth of the librarian is linked with support of the management, the interaction with the users and his/her own potential to learn.

Parents cannot be left out in this venture. They are the most influential factors in a child's life and if they provide an example of valuing books, their children are sure to grow into perceptive readers.

### **BENEFITS OF AND NEED FOR ACTIVITIES**

Having made out a strong case for reading, how are we going to bring it about through the library? Children always relate with enthusiasm and openness to games and interactive situations. Anything that breaks the routine is always welcomed by them. Coming to the library itself is something they look forward to but if there is a dullness about the place and too many restrictions, then the charm fades. We are not suggesting that they can be chaotic in the library but it is an open-ended place where different kinds of material and information are available. It is also a place where each child can discover something for herself without someone telling her about it. Through activities the students can be made to see that the library is a treasure chest of knowledge and the key to it is in their own hands.

Games and activities bring about a relaxed and informal atmosphere. In this environment, much learning takes place. The librarian has the great advantage of working in an open situation with no examinations or syllabus to cover. However the challenge lies in the multi-dimensional aspect of learning in the library. Therefore, interactive and hands-on projects work best to convey all the nuances of library use. During an activity, there is far more opportunity for creativity to flower. Individual strengths can also be discovered and encouraged. With the intelligent use of such activities, the librarian is able to cover all facets of the library. The students learn to respond spontaneously, think on their feet and come up with their own ideas. Another invaluable advantage of these activities is that it makes the students more participatory in the running of the library and there is a growing sense of ownership and responsibility to the place. For the librarian, this team of reliable helpers makes his/her duties less onerous and more enjoyable. Teachers too find new ways to convey information to their students through the library and begin to contribute to the life of the place. Thus the library benefits from such a lively, involved set of users.

We will now go into all the activities, assignments and projects that can be initiated by the school library to bring about this extraordinary act of reading.

The activities are listed in three categories according to the stages of interaction.

1. **Basic and Primary :**

Activities and games to get acquainted with the library, the librarian, the resources and the services. (Receiving, taking and benefiting)

2. **Secondary and Interactive:**

Activities to further the relationship and enhance use for others. (Involvement and Immersion.)

3. **Tertiary and Contributive:**

Projects and activities which complete the circle of interaction by giving back to the library. (Pay back time).

We suggest that you can take on these three sets of activities term by term. Do the basic ones in the first term and so on.

**Games, Activities and programmes to enhance reading.**

**Basic or Primary**

1. Orientation to the library and the material. Introduction to browsing. For elementary and secondary levels.

Time: 45 minutes.

Using a senior student to take the children on a tour of the library is excellent because the older student shares his pleasure in reading and discovering the library. They are shown the kinder box, (a box with an assorted collection of books which is changed once a term) the reference room, the notice board, the displays and any other interesting facets. Then send them off to browse after telling them what it means! Explain the aspect of serendipity which magically happens during browsing. After this, ask them to write down any one thing they saw which

impressed them the most as well as the most appealing spot for them in the library. Use these to put up on the board for them and others to see.

2. Care of books and making of bookmarks. For elementary and secondary levels

Time: 45 minutes.

Talk to the children about the natural enemies of books – fire, water, dirt and rats! Show them how to turn pages and how the spine needs protection. Then divide them into groups of four and have half the children make small posters to show how to care for the book and the other half can make book marks with similar captions and pictures. Put up the posters and keep the book marks on a table in the library for use by all users.

3. Treasure Hunt in the library. For elementary and secondary levels

Time: 45 minutes

When young children enter the library for the first time, it indeed looks like a treasure trove to them. In order to sustain this sense of wonder and help them to get acquainted with the library, this game is suggested. The class can be divided into groups of three or four. Prepare as many clues as there are groups. Give the first team the first clue. This will lead them to a book where the second clue is hidden and so on. The last clue can lead them to the treasure which could be a special story book from which you can read out a story or a set of picture books they can look at. The clues are very simple for young ones, gradually getting more challenging as the age level increases. Some example of clues for young children:

1. Where would you find books on Origami? What is origami and where did it start?
2. Books from A to Z. To get information you just need to know your alphabet! What comes after O and can be found in Egypt? Find a picture .of it.

Some examples for older students.

1. We are going to Jaipur on our excursion. Where can we find information, pictures and stories on Rajasthan?
2. Who wrote a very frank diary of her life for teenagers to read?

The next activity that comes about naturally is when students of one section want to set a treasure hunt for the other section and vice versa. This will entail considerable familiarity with the library and the ability to give challenging clues.

4. Story telling and reading out. For elementary and secondary levels

Time: 30 minutes

From the days of the Arabian Nights and Scheherazade, story telling has enchanted children and adults of all ages. So as a librarian, you have this unique opportunity to convey some of the resources of the library in story form to your eager listeners.

For ages 6 to 10, short stories can be told or read out depending on your comfort level. For older students, a continuing story or novel can be read out each week. Sometimes, the students and we, have shared the reading, which is a nice variation. If we can access a film version of the book, this is shown at the end, followed by a discussion on the film version vis a vis the book.

Some stories enjoyed by ages 6 to 10.

1. Pinocchio by Carlo Collodi
2. Alice in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll
3. The Laura Ingalls Wilder series (about the young Laura)
4. Black Beauty
5. Who will be Ningthou? By Indira Ghosh
6. Bishnu the Dhobi Singer by Subhadra Sengupta
7. The Emperor's Nightingale by Hans Christian Andersen
8. The Little Fir Tree by Hans Christian Andersen
9. Ancient Bird legends of India compiled by Shanta Rameshwar Rao
10. Arabian Nights
11. Stories from the Panchatantra
12. The why why girl by Mahashwetha Devi
13. Mahagiri by Shankar
14. The Lorax by Dr. Suess
15. Tenali Raman

16. Tales of Mullah Nasruddin
17. Akbar and Birbal Stories.

Some books and stories enjoyed by ages 11 to 14.

1. Watership Down by Richard Adams
2. The Hobbit by J.R.R. Tolkien
3. Swami and Friends by R.K. Narayan
4. Mahabharata for Children by Shanta Rameshwar Rao
5. The Iliad and the Odyssey by Homer. (A simplified translation will be ideal)
6. How much land does a man require? Short story by Leo Tolstoy
7. The Man who planted trees by Jean Giono
8. Any good science fiction stories by Isaac Asimov, Ray Bradbury, Arthur C, Clarke etc.
9. Stories by Jim Corbett
10. Tom Sawyer by Mark Twain
11. Jahanara. The story of a princess by Subhadra Sengupta
12. Panther's Moon by Ruskin Bond.
13. Hiroshima by Laurence Yep
14. The life of Gandhi. (NBT)
15. Letters from a father to a daughter by Jawaharlal Nehru
16. Tale of Two Cities or Great Expectations by Charles Dickens
17. To kill a mockingbird
18. Stories by Premchand, Masti Venkatesh Iyengar, Kalki , Rabindranath Tagore etc
19. Play reading of plays by Oscar Wilde, Bernard Shaw, Girish Karnad, Arthur Miller etc
20. Animal farm by George Orwell.

The last four are suitable for age 13 and above.

5. Follow-up of previous activity.

For elementary and secondary levels

Time: Could go over two library periods.

After we have read out two or three stories over a few weeks, the children can be divided into groups of six. Each group takes up one of the stories told, and after deciding on the characters, they can enact a version of the story as a play for the rest of the class. This is good for a language teacher to be involved with if she wishes. For example, after listening to the story of King Midas, the children enacted it with their own dialogue.

Older children can write a script for a story and act it out without too much preparation.

This activity brings the story and characters alive.

6. Simple games like Dumb Charades, Memory Games etc.

For elementary levels.

Time: 45 minutes or less.

In Dumb Charades, one group acts out the name of a book for the others to guess.

The memory game has the children sitting in a circle. Then each says the name of a favourite or recently read book. The next person repeats that and adds her own. By the end, children have to remember almost twenty to thirty titles!!

Buzz is usually played with numbers. Here we can have the children say the name of an author or book instead of Buzz. Great fun.

Illustration: Have young children illustrate a story they have heard. Or draw one favourite episode from a story they like.

To make it more challenging, we can say that only books and authors available in the library are allowed.

7. Display board activity

For all ages

Time: Ongoing.

Here children contribute cartoons, jokes, pictures, posters related to reading and books, to the display board. The librarian also puts up a question a day/week about anything related to books, authors, and publishers.

For example: Who is the author who lives in a hill station in North India and writes about nature and wildlife? Or:

Who was the boy whose nose got longer every time he told a lie? Or:

Who is the author of - (any book you have in the library)

What did Louis Braille invent?

In other activities you can generate book reviews, poems, illustrations of stories, writings about their favourite place in the library, interesting statistics about the collection etc. These too can be displayed regularly. The Display board must be changed every week because this too is part of the reading programme.

#### 8. A Session about books.

For all ages.

Time: 30 minutes

Pick out some unique books from your collection. Then introduce them to the children one by one, giving interesting information about the author, the illustrator, the publisher and the date of publication. These could include medal winning books, a single masterpiece by an author, or very old books where copyright dates do not exist. This unconscious learning is invaluable for the children in their appreciation and evaluation of books throughout their lives.

Select an assortment of books from the library which have been gifted, bought secondhand or have been beautifully repaired by other students. You can also show them the very first book acquired by the library, the 100<sup>th</sup>, the 1000<sup>th</sup> and so on. Thus the history of the book gets established and they begin to see how each book is individual and precious.

#### 9. Creating weekly book displays

This can be done by the librarian together with students in the following ways. If there are any themes of topical interest, students can search the collection to bring out relevant material.

They will also enjoy physically arranging new books displays. Sheer handling of new books sets up an interest in them!

Ideas for projects can be initiated by students by discovering many books on a topic. They may then broach the idea to a receptive teacher.

Another idea is that after a week the new books could be transferred to a separate shelf for a longer period so that new books are not forgotten after the display period. Children have come up with funny labels for this shelf, like “halfway home” and “Just resting” etc

#### 10. Reading out poems and short stories in Assembly.

For teachers and students of all ages.

If the school can set aside one Assembly a week or two weeks for a presentation of poems or stories, the library is inundated with users looking for good material. This is a very good buzz for the library. The books used are then displayed in the library for a week.

11. Reference games  
Time: 45 minutes

For elementary and secondary levels

Learning how to search for, and find relevant information is a very vital part of library use. Before the students actually do reference work for a class project or assignment, we feel there is a need to introduce young children to reference materials through games and activities. At a young age there is a sense of wonder and fulfillment when they discover that when they want to know about something, someone or some place, they can actually find the information on their own by doing “reference work”!

So we begin to introduce young children from the age of 7 and above to different reference tools. The first thing we do is to make it a very ceremonious entry to the reference area! This is where, they are told, they can find correct information about almost everything. However, we also share with them that there may be questions for which we human beings do not have answers. We then go through a quick checklist of reference tools and in a discussion, establish what kind of information each source gives. For example, encyclopedias cover almost all areas of information, whereas dictionaries provide meanings of words, root meaning and source, pronunciation, along with a sentence to make the meaning clear. Dictionaries also carry information about tables, weights and measures, abbreviations, symbols. Atlases on the other hand give complete geographical facts, both physical and political, agricultural and meteorological.

Now this kind of knowledge must be tried and tested to become clear to the child. So we use the following games to help them discover and use the tools.

a. Encyclopedias

Each child, or in pairs or fours (depending on the size of your class) is asked to note down one piece of information they really want to know. After they have done this, the librarian shows how to choose the right level of encyclopedia and also how to access the material. At this point a discussion can take place about the way an encyclopedia is arranged, and why. Or they can write down their guesses. After they are all clear on how to find information in an encyclopedia, they are ready to start the game!

Send out groups of four or five with their queries, to search. If you can ensure that these are looking for different volumes, there will be less confusion. But if there is some confusion, don't worry. Children do learn in all kinds of ways! Once they have found it, tell them to note down the volume and page number. Repeat this process until all have had a turn. This is probably all one can do in one period. Collect the slips of paper.

In the next class you can assign the groups to locate their source. (The others can enjoy browsing through other reference books.) They then write three sentences in their own words about the item they were looking for. After that ask them to do a brief presentation to the whole class about the information they have found, and also to tell the others where they found it. The next time, you can rotate this process. A lot of unconscious learning is taking place even though a small group may actually do the searching.

### b. Atlases

Again the students are formed into pairs or fours, or alone depending on your class. Each unit is given an atlas. Then, ask them to select any place in the world they have heard about and would like to visit! After this they can be taught to go to the index, locate page number and coordinates. Then the fun begins when they do the 'finger' test. Left hand for latitude, right hand for longitude. Make the fingers meet and hey presto! Imagine their delight when they find the place. After this they can find out more information about the place itself. Help them to find it on a wall map, and then on a globe. Ask if they find any differences. The fun and discovery is endless.

### c. Dictionaries

Here it would be best if each child has a pocket dictionary. Many children own one, and can be asked to bring it to school for this activity. The librarian calls out a word and the students must find the meaning, pronunciation, and have a sentence ready in their heads to be shared when asked. If your class has different levels of ability, give three different words, one for each level. I have described the games only for the three basic tools but such games can be tried for other sources too. For older students of 10 and above, we have asked them to write down and bring their queries. One child had the question, "Why do we die"? This was an absorbing quest because it spanned books on biology, on philosophy and psychology as well! At the end, we had to agree that we don't have a final answer.

Another point is that one must repeat these exercise and games every one or two years until the students are well into projects. For older students, additional skills of reading and culling out relevant information are necessary. These can be done through simulation exercises of taking an assignment and going through the process of searching both in books and on the net, assessing the information for bias, currency and reliability, taking notes and converting the notes into a strong piece of writing. Of course this is best done by the language teacher but the library and the librarian can support this skill building to great benefit.

### **Secondary or Interactive:**

#### 1. Book Talks.

Elementary, Secondary and Senior levels.

Time : 45 minutes.

A book talk is a presentation of a book by one student to others in the class. In a period of 45 minutes, two children can talk about a book they have read recently.

This activity can be done over one term in the academic year for each class or for selected classes.

#### Preparation

1. Introduce this idea and show them how it works by doing a book talk yourself or having an older student do one, of a story that they all know well, like "The three little pigs" or Akbar and Birbal.
2. Explain the format to them or have it written on a large sheet and keep it on display.
3. Make the plan for the sequence of 'talkers' and enter it on the calendar for convenience.
4. Give them some tips on how to organize and prepare the presentation.
5. Help them with their selection of book if they want.

## Presentation

Each student talks about:

1. The title of the book. Is it part of a series? If so what are the other titles?
2. The author/s along with any information about them. This is more in-depth as the student gets older.
3. The illustrator/s. Recognition of other books illustrated by them
4. Kind of book or story. (Adventure, mystery, fantasy, wildlife, science fiction, humour, human interest etc)
5. A brief outline of the story, (**not** a narration of the story) making sure the end is not given away.
6. Style of writing. Conversational, descriptive, first person etc.
7. Main characters and which, if any, they identified with and why.
8. Reading out of one or two short excerpts.
9. Their personal response and why.
10. Suggested readership level and interest.
11. What made them borrow the book. Did anyone suggest it?
12. Any other interesting features they noticed.

## Discussion

This is a vital part of the book talk. Time is given for questions from the listeners. The librarian must guide this discussion unobtrusively! Each listener must be urged to ask a question. I have found that amazing aspects and subtleties are brought out in this session. It is also possible to touch upon delicate issues of gender bias, discrimination, sexuality, disabilities, prejudice etc in a very natural way when the book has these elements. Therefore the importance of having well-written books for children and young people in your library!

## Variations

- a. Book talks on books by Indian authors.
- b. Talks on Travel books or Biographies.
- c. Talks on non-fiction books

## Outcome

Children have the incentive to read, appraise the book in many different ways, plan how to present, organize their talk in point form, speak coherently, read out clearly, listen and comprehend, ask searching questions and finally, to be participative in the discussions. Also, the listeners often get attracted to borrow a book based on the presentation.

2. Journal review

For senior students. Class 7 and above.

Time: 45 minutes

Each student selects or is helped to select a journal/periodical in the library to read and review. Two students can present at a time, keeping the following points in mind. These points can be given to the class at the time of selection.

Name of magazine

*Publisher*

*Place of publishing*

*Theme or focus of the magazine*

*Cost*

*Frequency*

*Visuals (Photographs, Illustrations etc)*

*Advertisements*

*Language*

*Style of the writing*

*Currency of news*

*Readership (age, level, interest etc)*

*Permanence*

*No. of pages*

*Critical appraisal*

*Value for money in the context of the school*

*Bias of the journal/article*

Suggestions for increasing readership in school

3. Writing of book reviews.

For secondary and senior levels.

Time: Can be given as home-work

In the library period, a variety of well-written book reviews taken from newspapers and other sources can be photocopied and distributed. The librarian can read out some reviews to highlight certain aspects of the review. For example, universality of appeal, authenticity, lively style, details of appearance, value, critical appraisal etc. The students can then make their own choice of book to review, i.e. reference book, fiction, non-fiction and so on. They are asked to write a review for library home-work! Good reviews can be posted on the board for others to see.

#### 4. Book Auction

For elementary and secondary levels.

Time: 45 minutes

This activity is meant to generate a level of excitement for books and uses the mode of an auction to do so! There is no money transaction involved nor do the students actually “buy” any books. They bid to borrow them. Here is how it works.

One set of children extols the virtues of books they have read and enjoyed, to a younger group or to a set of their own class. They do this in the style of an auctioneer.

For example, “This is a fantastic book by Roald Dahl. It is about...etc. If you have not yet read it, you are really missing out. This is a great chance for you to grab it and join the grand club of those who have read it. If you borrow it, all your friends will be envious of you. They too will want it....and so on and on!”

The “bidders” have a set of 20 units of leaves, pebbles, shells, marbles, paper planes, bookmarks etc, which they make or collect, and use that to bid with... One of the children can oversee the whole activity and be the auctioneer who says, “Going, going...gone!”

Do this in the library when no other class is using it or step outside the building and conduct it outdoors. Watch the fun that follows!

#### 5. Taking students to book stores and book fairs.

For all levels

Time: One afternoon on a weekend or from school

Why? This is a very vital part of the involvement of your users in the selection process and helps them to feel responsible and accountable for the collection. They learn about authors, illustrators, publishers and bookshops of different kinds. Don’t forget to check out second hand stores or sales. You can save money and get more for your budget!

How is it to be done? In a year, plan to take at least three groups on such expeditions! These could be three individual classes, or volunteers ranging over the three classes.

Ideal group size: 20 to 25. If there are teachers present, this number could go up to 30.

Time needed at the store or fair : At least 2 to 3 hours.

What are the key elements in this exercise?

Before :

First, make a preliminary trip to the place to be visited. The reason is that it helps for you to be familiar with the layout and collection. You can also alert the store that you will bring in children and reassure them that you will be responsible for them. All the book stores are very open to this idea.

Second, have a budget and theme or age group in mind for each visit.

Third, have a brief meeting with the group where you can bring up the following points.

1. You, the students, are vital because you know which books we have and can avoid repeats.
2. You know best what is interesting and enjoyable for your peers and juniors.
3. Please be aware that you are buying for the school library and not just for yourselves. So you must have a wider vision. Anything you select will have to be suitable for another 20 or 30 users.
4. Suitability of content, value for price, currency of material, are aspects that you are imbuing constantly in your interaction with the library.
5. Browsing first is essential before selecting.
6. Try to think for yourself and not get too influenced by your friends. We need a variety and range of material!

### During:

You have all gone together from school or met outside the store or fair.

Have a quick round up of points made earlier by asking the students to recollect them.

Lets go in!

Allow them to browse for 45 minutes at least and only then start gathering possible books. Pile all books in a corner of the store. (Store assistants are quite intrigued by this and are co-operative!)

Meanwhile you and other teachers, if present, can walk around making sure everyone is involved.

Then call everyone to the corner and the real exercise begins!

Show each book, ask the person who has selected it to say why quickly. Then decide TOGETHER whether it goes into the Yes, No or Maybe stack. This may take another 45 minutes.

Then ask for a calculator and let a volunteer total the cost. If it is less than the budget, go through the Maybe lot again.

Now you should have a collection matching the planned expenditure.

Inform the assistant that you are done and apologise for any bother.

Some students can oversee the billing and the payment.

After this let each student select any book he or she will introduce to the school and take it home for perusal.

If the school can afford it, you can treat the children to an MTR ice cream cone as a treat!

### After:

In the next week whenever possible, at the school assembly, try to have a presentation of the books bought, with individual children showing books they selected and saying why they did so.

Display the books in the library for a week.

While accessing the books, enter name of student who selected the book. This is archival information and is very interesting and revealing after a few years.

### Benefits:

Students are exposed to the rationale behind selection and all the issues involved. They learn how to discern quality. They feel responsible for the collection and its use. As adults we also learn how to listen to the users and sense their inclinations. Overall it is an enormous help having so many pairs of eyes to spot good books. Once the books are in the library, the children who

made the selections are promoters of the books to other users so the whole dissemination process is distributed!

Note: At Book Fairs, we divide ourselves into three groups for language books, age level or non-fiction and go our own ways. This of course needs one adult or older student to be with each group. Incidentally, since we have done this for so many years, our older students are more than capable of handling a group of younger students.

Variations we have tried :

Selecting a group of students who have read everything in the library and are hungering for more.

Taking students who hardly read!

Visit to second hand book shops

Groups looking for children's books with excellent illustrations.

An art and craft group.

Sports interested group.....and any other group you find!!

6. Repair of books and making of book jackets. For secondary and senior students

Time: 45 minutes as well as ongoing.

Books being used by children are always in need of repair even if they are handled with care. As part of care of books, the students do enjoy repairing books imaginatively. Many times, such repaired books are displayed for others to see and learn.

Book jackets are made for books whose covers are torn or frayed. Two children take on a book each and create a loose dust jacket for the book. They illustrate the cover, write the title and also write the gist of the book on the inside cover. At the back, they give a brief account of the author. They also include quotes from teachers and other students who have read the book. The benefits to all, especially to the book, are evident!

7. Book Acrostics For secondary and senior levels

Time: 45 minutes.

The children are asked to select a favourite book or author and write the name, letter by letter one below the other. Then for each letter they must write a sentence or a phrase which describes the book and their own response to it. The examples given below may be useful.

Holes by Louis Sachar

Heartless warden. Heartless camp. Is that all in this book?

Oh No! A net of intertwined events and relationships.

Louis Sachar lured me into his books with this one.

Even if you've seen the movie, please read the book.

Something you will never regret reading

-Written by a 13 year old girl-

Leaf Life by Sirish Rao

Learn a lot

Engaging

Amazingly calming

Fascinating facts

Leads you into the world of observing

Impressive illustrations

Fills you with wonder

Enters your head well.

Written by a 10 year old girl

Bishnu (the Dhobi singer) by Subhadra Sengupta

Bishnu is a poor boy

It's his dream to be a singer

So a professional singer allows him to be his student

He gets better every day

Now he is one of the best students

Until now his dream was just a dream, now it's reality!

Written by a 11 year old boy.

#### 8. Just- a- minute

For secondary and senior levels

Time: 45 minutes

Students are divided into teams of 4 or 5 each. Three students are needed to conduct the game in the following way. One calls out a word, the next is the judge, the third is the time-keeper. The game begins with a word being called out from a dictionary. Each team by turn must speak for at least one minute on the given word, **linking it to books and libraries**. If the speaker fumbles or repeats or is not correct, any other team can object. If the student-judge agrees to the objection, then that person must continue on the same word for the remainder of the minute. Whoever is still speaking at the end of one minute is the winner and the next round begins. This game was adapted by us from the BBC one!

Some examples of words used: Freedom, Present, Time, Ring, Home, Island, Bird, Time.

#### 9. Adopt-a-book

For elementary and secondary levels

Time: 30 minutes

In this activity children of one class are encouraged to browse and select a book or author they wish to adopt. They are told what it means to adopt someone. A lot of care and affection, protection and nurturing. So once they have adopted a book, they must look after it if it needs repair. They must see that it is read and enjoyed and they must ensure it does not get lost!! The students enter their choices in a little notebook which is open for all to see.

This idea was taken from the British Library, London where users adopt a book by paying for it but we felt this variation was more appealing.

#### 10. Prediction charts

For elementary and secondary levels.

Time: 30 minutes or less.

With no pressure or a sense of being measured, ask the children to make a prediction chart for a borrowed book like this :

“I will read \_\_\_\_\_ pages by this weekend.’ Or “I will finish this book in -----days.”

When they return the book, they can compare their prediction with the reality. They can then either adjust the prediction for next time or gear up their reading to match the prediction.

11. Having a reading journal

For secondary and senior levels

Time: At home

Each child can make or buy a small note book called “I have read it.” There they can enter the name, the author and the illustrator of the book and give it their own star-rating. This is a wonderful record for the student to look back on and can be exchanged with other students for further reading. A good record for the school too.

12. Variations on borrowing.

For elementary and secondary levels

Time: 20 minutes

This is when you encourage students to borrow a book for a grandparent, a parent or a sibling. This makes them select differently and they will visit other sections of the library. This will also draw the family into the reading circle.

13. Wall magazine

For all levels

Time: 45 minutes

A group of 10 to 12 children takes on this assignment each week. The wall magazine might have current book reviews, book news, illustrations, school news or happenings in the library.

14. Writing letters to authors

For elementary and secondary levels

Time: 45 minutes

Selecting a favourite author is the first step in this activity. Children in pairs then write a letter to the author, Sometimes if the author is accessible, he or she replies which gives a great boost to the reading programme. These letters are displayed on the library board.

A condensed version:

Dear Dr. Suess,

How do you do? I like your stories because they have imaginary places and things. I used to love your books when I was 5 years old. Can you make your books so that a 15 year old can also like them? Bye for now,

Brishti. Age 11.

### **Tertiary or Contributive:**

These can be done as projects over a whole term for as many classes as the librarian can handle.

1. Books created by the students. For elementary and secondary levels.

Based on discussions of greatest interest to themselves and to other users, children have made biographies of people they come in contact with and called it, "A Day in the life of..." These have been about a bus driver, a hotel worker, a cobbler, a shopkeeper, a jeweller, a car mechanic and many others. The librarian helps the children identify such people in the neighbourhood, assists them in their interviews and guides the design and format of the book. Children take simple photographs of the person also, to add to the realism of the book.. Other topics have been about travel to a place together, myths and legends, interviews with support staff of the school and other themes. These little books are then accessed in the library and shelved under "Inhouse Publications!"

2. Creating bibliographies. For secondary and senior levels

Students in pairs select a category, under which they then create a bibliography of material available in the library. They are taught how to put down bibliographic data in the right sequence. They put these up on attractive charts which are displayed in the relevant section in the library to help other users in selection. This is one more way in which the work of the librarian is shared by the users.

Examples of themes with the titles given by the students are: True-Life stories, A Peep into Other Lands, Myth and Magic, Indian Context, Mathematical Activities and others.

3. Making a map and guide of the library. For senior levels

This can be taken up by a group of senior students. A lot of learning in other subjects happens here and this is where co-operation from teachers, management and even parents comes in. for providing access to the plan of the building or room, guidance in mapping techniques and geometrical calculation! The students measure and make a sketch of the library. They work closely with the librarian to understand the classification and shelving sequences. Then the actual

map is made with careful attention to detail. A key has to be provided as well. This is a great help to guests and even regular users of the library.

#### 4. Reader surveys and reader profiles

For senior levels

These form an important record for the school and volunteers from the senior school can always be found to take them on imaginatively.

Students create a reader profile which they distribute, make sure they are properly filled out, collect and collate the results. For example, questions asked of younger children are:

Do you find reading easy, fun, hard work, boring? Tick one.

Can you find the sorts of books you like in this library?

If you could have a book written specially for you, what would it be about?

Space is provided for a signature as well as a thumb- print. All in all, a very successful and enjoyable activity.

A questionnaire is created for older students and teachers about use of the library. The students named it an optionnaire! Questions included were:

Do you use the library other than during the library period?

If not, what are the factors which come in the way? Some funny alternatives as well as serious ones were given.

After all the responses came in, they took on the huge task of analyzing the data and showing the findings on a graph displayed in the library. Truly a worthwhile project involving the Maths, Statistics and Art teachers.

#### 4. Mini-seminar presentations

For senior level

This is a rite of passage that every senior takes on before passing out of the school. Each one selects a topic of his or her interest. This could be academic or non-academic. They prepare by doing reference and research in the library, organize and plan a presentation for 30 minutes. Finally the mini-seminar takes place with an audience of all those teachers and other seniors who can attend. After a talk of 30 minutes, questions are asked mainly by the students and also by teachers. Books and material used by the speaker are kept on display. Feedback is given to the student later regarding content, organization and presentation.

A variation of this is a more in-depth book talk by students on a book **outside their subject area**. This is to ensure that they keep other interests open even at an older age. From feedback given by ex-students, these two activities have helped them a lot later on in their academic career.

Another variation is to invite teachers to present book talks in their subject area and have students ask questions. The next step would be to invite parents also to give book talks. The result would be a wide exposure for the young students and a new look at familiar people.

6. Talks and lectures by experts, authors, guests                      For secondary and senior levels.

Time: 1 hour

Any contacts with interesting and eminent experts should be nurtured, and talks by them held in the library. Authors too can make their books come alive. Time must be kept for students to ask questions.

7. A film on the library    For senior levels.

Nowadays films are easily made with a hand-held video camera. Take advantage of this and have a group make a film about the library in all its aspects. The students must write a script first. They can find out what needs to be done through books in the library. They must then select the activities and services they wish to show. Who will say what? Once these decisions are taken, the film is ready to be shot. They may need help from someone in the school for editing but once it is done, the whole school will enjoy watching it! It is also a documentation of the library.

8. Weeding out of books    For senior levels and teachers

This is a librarian's nightmare! As new books keep getting added, how does the librarian decide what to keep and what to discard. Obviously informed users can be of assistance here. So subject teachers are requested to help in their areas. Senior students also assist teachers. For fiction, a set of students can take it on. This last exercise goes through two or more teachers and librarian. Apart from the actual aim, users discover many books that had been forgotten and a fresh surge of reading both by teachers and students is made possible.

9. Reviews on hand

For secondary and senior levels

Reading a review written by another student is always very appealing to children. So ask your students to choose a book they have read, write a colourfully illustrated review of it and stick it into the book. Thus whenever the book is read there is a tailor-made review in it.

10. Preparing indexes of useful articles in journals.

For senior levels

This is quite a challenging activity and requires careful guidance from the librarian and also subject teachers. Themes which are significant in each subject are compiled. Then the journals which have worthwhile articles are selected. Crucial ideas and decisions emerge as to ways in which to compile and present the indexes. For example, should contents pages be photocopied and stuck in a register? Should particular topics be highlighted in different colour? Entering cover stories into the computer so that they can be searched for when needed? All these can be tried out with success.

11. Reading about and interviewing someone significant.

For senior levels

Young people are always fascinated by success stories. This activity will enable them to find out all about an unique individual at first hand. This can be done in the form of an interview. The model for this can be taken from well-known interviews shown on television. Students can begin by interviewing the headmaster or a famous parent of the school and printing it out for circulation.

12. Involvement in school magazine.

For senior levels

Many schools bring out a school newsletter or magazine. The library can be involved by encouraging students to look at books on newspapers and journals for ideas, and also to contribute to the production and editing of the journal. Student volunteers who are regular users of the library are the ones who can take on this assignment.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

In this module, we have looked at the overwhelming importance of reading as a life skill and how the library can play a key role in bringing this about. Activities and games have the unique quality of bringing about creativity and learning in a relaxed manner. Independent thinking, initiative, self-confidence and articulation are all developed in a non-judgemental, non-competitive environment. The activities have been listed in some detail.

The aim has been to provide a window into different ways of encouraging reading and sustaining it. All the activities listed are those which have actually been done with children in a school library. However the intention is not to overwhelm or over-burden the librarian. On the contrary, many of these activities lend themselves to added involvement, help and interaction from the users. We suggest that the librarian initially try out a few activities which she feels comfortable with, and gradually move into more challenging ones. But it is vital that she does move on into uncharted waters, otherwise, the level of comfort can settle into stagnation! The other point is that this is not an exhaustive list. Therefore new ideas can enter the scene at any point generated by the librarian from observation of her users' needs, from teachers and even from the students themselves. Thus the atmosphere is a dynamic one which is always responding to perceived need and use.

The activities described here can happen throughout the year. However there are special occasions like National Library Week, International Book Day and birth anniversaries of notable figures. A sample of these activities can be done for such celebrations. Apart from this the librarian might also choose to designate a day or a week for activities to enhance reading. Again, a judicious choice can be made from the listed activities. The idea of inviting an author, book publisher or a librarian can also be thought of.

Reading is not an isolated activity. It comes from awareness of, and relationship with, a collection of books. Most of all it is nurtured by exposure and experiences. In a school library, reading is also linked with the teachers, the librarian, and the parents who introduce children to

good books. Therefore, reading, caring for books, looking after the library and being responsible users, all comes together at this stage in their lives. The foundations laid now for all these desirable qualities will last a lifetime.

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