

The reasons for programming on the cheap are not new to this economic downturn; they have existed in libraries for years. Small libraries with little or no budget for programming as well as fledgling teen and YA librarians just starting out have been doing this dance for years. There's no need to reinvent the wheel. Use what you have readily available or can get for free or low cost.

Read on for ten easy tips for low and no-cost programs for teens.

1. Keep your projects simple

You can find lots of great craft ideas created for younger kids that you can adapt for older participants. Teens can always improve on something easy, but if it's too hard, they tend to get frustrated and give up. Just keep your age group in mind as you choose your projects.

Example: Pet Rocks

Needed supplies: clean rocks, all shapes and sizes (collect on walks or have teens bring in their own), acrylic paint and paint brushes, or permanent markers. Optional supplies: wiggle eyes, pipe cleaners, fabric scraps, tacky glue. Let the teens create fantastical pets by painting or using markers to add details to their rocks.

Ta-da—Pet Rock!

2. Have the proper supplies on hand

Nothing sinks a fun time faster than finding out you don't have the right kind of glue or have run out of green tissue paper. Choose projects only if you have all the needed supplies on hand. Make a checklist and use it—check off each item as you collect it. Recycle, reuse, and repurpose all materials that you can.

Crafting Cheap and Successful Teen Programs

By Charli Osborne

Example: Sock or Glove Creatures

Needed supplies: socks (finally an opportunity to use all those single socks that are orphaned by dryers everywhere) or gloves, sewing thread, needles, scissors. Optional supplies include: wiggle eyes, fabric scraps, fabric glue, pipe cleaners, bits of old jewelry, polyester batting, or cotton balls. Let the teens create traditional sock puppets or let them stuff their creatures with batting or cotton balls.

3. Try registration

If you register your teens, you'll know how many people to expect and prepare for. This is especially helpful if you have

multiple components to your program that need to be gathered, bought, and set up in advance. It also gives you the opportunity to contact participants, either by phone or e-mail, the day before the program to remind them that they signed up. This reminder can keep you from having a disappointingly low turnout at a program.

4. Limit the number of teens per program

Believe it or not, this can create more interest in your programs! If registration is required and limited for a program, it sounds exclusive and special and teens love exclusive and special. It's important to

The core concepts of cheap and crafty programming have been very useful to CHARLI OSBORNE, Head of Teen Services at Oxford Public Library in Oxford, Michigan, in growing her teen section from two shelves of YA stickered books in the children's area in 1997 to a lovely 1,200 square-foot teen area, complete with a teen service desk, a 10,000-item collection, and four staff (one full time and three part time), in 2009.

make sure everyone gets some one-on-one attention, and this is one way to do it. You can always add another session if the program fills up.

5. Consider asking for a deposit

Although it may seem counterintuitive, this works wonderfully to get teens through the door. Many people consider free programming to be “worthless” programming. Asking for a dollar or two to hold a place instantly adds value. It also teaches and encourages financial responsibility. When the teens attend the program, return the deposits. If they don't attend, keep the money to use for more programming. Make sure to keep the deposit money in a safe place.

6. Hire an expert!

If you don't have the know-how in your chosen craft, find someone who does. This doesn't have to be expensive—you may know someone who is willing to barter time or expertise with you. Don't forget to approach local business people.

Example: Scrapbooking

If you have a scrapbooking store in town, ask the owner if they would be willing to run a program and donate supplies for one. This collaboration is a win-win scenario and can result in a well-attended program for you, since you have built-in advertisement and good word-of-mouth for the store.

7. Promote widely

You probably have a few teens who come to all your programs. Encourage them to talk to their friends. Send flyers with your teens to the schools. Put information in the local papers. Put up posters in the local teen hangout, whether it be Starbucks or the bowling alley. (Make

sure you get permission first!) Talk your programs up at school visits, booktalks, and during other programs. Let parents know about your programs—they may sign up their teens.

8. Don't hover

Be available to help if asked, but let the kids make mistakes, ask for help from their neighbors, and socialize. Consider every program a process program and not a results program. This isn't school—it should be fun!

Example: Multi-Media Art

Needed supplies: paper or poster board to use as background, fabric scraps, wallpaper samples, tissue paper, ribbon, cording, scissors, and white or tacky glue. Give the teens a thematic suggestion to get them going and watch the fun.

9. Make it a contest

The best contests are anonymous, decreasing pressure on teens to be perfect while still allowing them to be creative. Recruit judges from your schools, local businesses, and library staff. Or ask the teens to vote. Anonymous contests avoid the whole “I'm only voting for my friends” faction if you have a teen vote. Prizes don't have to be expensive—certificates you print yourself can be quite impressive, especially if you call in the local newspaper to take photos of contest winners with the certificates.

Example: Design and FLY a Paper Airplane

Needed supplies: paper, measuring tape, books about paper airplanes. Give the teens about twenty minutes to design and create their paper airplanes. Have contests for flight distance, stunt capability, and design creativity.

10. Evaluate and keep statistics

Know what programs could have included twenty more kids and which ones flopped. Make note if the teens ask you to do the program again and then *do it again* after a few months.

Cheap and Easy Passive Programming

Coloring Sheets

Everyone loves to color, whether they are young or old, male or female. Sign up for Dover Publications sampler e-mails to get free coloring sheets and puzzles delivered right to your e-mail box. All you have to do is download and print! Provide colored pencils, crayons or fine-tip markers, and let the teens take over from there. Display the completed coloring pages and follow tip number 9 to make it a coloring contest judged by local art teachers or the teens themselves.

Magnetic Poetry

Buy adhesive strip magnets. Create and print sheets of words. Have teens assemble the magnets and display the completed magnetic poetry set with a cookie sheet. Old cookie sheets or other tins make great storage for your magnetic words. Expand on this idea and have the teens create poems for a particular theme. Don't forget tip number 9: print up the teens poems and have a poetry contest judged by local teachers or let the teens vote on their favorite poems.

Where to Get Supplies

Ask library staff and patrons for donations of items such as yogurt cups (good for paint cups), toilet paper or paper towel rolls (many uses), cookie and pie tins (great to hold supplies), and other items that you can recycle, reuse, and repurpose.

Explore dollar and thrift stores. Don't forget your local grocery store—you can sometimes find great deals on ingredients for crafts there. Ask your local home decorating store if they have wallpaper samples that they want to get rid of.

Web Sites

Free coloring page and puzzle samples can be found at <http://www.doverpublications.com/sampler4/>

Dover also has great "grown-up" coloring books.

How to Make a Magnetic Poetry Set
http://www.readwritethink.org/beyondtheclassroom/summer/grades6_8/MagneticPoetry/how_to_magnetic_poetry.pdf

Find More Inspiration

Looking for even more ideas? Check out YALSA's new book, *Cool Teen*

Programs for under \$100, edited by Jenine Lillian for YALSA. This essential, affordable guide offers helpful chapters on budgeting and marketing, plus more than 25 inexpensive, creative programs implemented by YALSA members across the United States and Canada. The book is available at the ALA Store, www.alastore.ala.org. YALS



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