

## Attractive Displays for Teen Spaces

By *Erminia Mina Gallo*

**B**efore I started my career as a teen services librarian, I worked for a bookstore for six months. The combined children and teen section of the store was separated from the rest of the bookstore, and it was there that I learned the importance of displays to attract readers to books. Bookstores are in the business of selling books. They have created display-friendly atmospheres to market their books and attract their audience. Since public libraries are in the business of circulating materials and keeping their customers reading, display spaces are necessary for marketing the collection. Many renovated libraries have incorporated new display spaces. This is great; however, many other libraries still have a small area with no display space to work with. Some libraries have a budget to purchase materials for displays but some have not. I have been a teen services librarian for ten years now and have worked in a newly renovated, display-friendly space as well as a small, traditional teen space. I incorporated what I learned from my bookstore experience with what other teen librarians have taught me to create displays to attract teen readers for Teen Read Weak™ (TRW) 2008.

Displays are the silent salespeople and appeal primarily to people's emotions. Materials need to be arranged so teens will see them, pick them up, and read them! This

can be done through clever displays, tie-in themes and props, and special arrangement of materials. The bookstore employed someone full time who just worked on displays for seven of their locations. This person used her creative abilities on designated display areas at each store location. Displays were planned out ahead of time by creating a rotation schedule, coming up with themes, designing or sketching out the displays, buying the supplies, and setting up the displays. Teen librarians can also take these steps in creating attractive displays for their large or small areas, a perfect way to showcase TRW @ your library.

First, look at your space for potential display areas. Every nook and cranny counts. Displays can be set up on tables, counter tops, shelves, desks, window ledges, and on slatwall. Ideally, the room should have a bulletin board and a marker board. If this is not possible, set up an easel and a large cardboard poster to act as a bulletin board. Can you spare the top half of a shelving unit? Have it taken apart and use the back of the unit as a bulletin board. Bulletin boards are a versatile tool in promoting your collection. I sometimes make

my bulletin board interactive by covering it with black construction paper for a chalkboard effect and attach fluorescent gel pens or chalk. Ask a question, like "Who is your favorite vampire?" Teens can respond by writing in their colorful responses.

Look up. Don't forget your ceiling as a display area. In the past, I've hung star balloons that were no longer being used by our publicity department to highlight a theme. For a music display, I attached some of my scratched CDs on pieces of yarn and dangled them from the ceiling. Just make sure that this won't set off your motion-alarm system!

Once you have found display areas, the next step is coming up with what you want to display and how you want to display those materials. If you have different display areas, you can have more than one tie-in to this year's theme, Books with Bite, for your materials, or you can use a space to promote a TRW program. Keep your displays neat, clean, and not overly cluttered. Ideas can come from the TRW Web site, the TRW wiki, or the Books with Bite pocket-sized pamphlet that all TRW registrants receive as a download. After you come up with the materials you want to display, add props for atmosphere.

Tie in props to your TRW display from everyday found items. Props can also be used to capture the attention of your audience. It is important to recognize that props help carry out a story, their purpose is to present and sell. Props should not dominate, hide, or draw attention away from the merchandise. Check your closets and your friends' closets for props. Susan Cozzans, readers services/programming coordinator at the Avon Lake (Colo.) Public Library states that her greatest display accomplishment is taking the ordinary and

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making it extraordinary. Props create a variety of effects and moods. Use dog biscuits in a bowl for a display on pets or popcorn in a bowl for a display on movie-related books. Place cooking utensils in pots and pans for a display on food-related books. Utilize baskets and throw in paperbacks adjacent to your display. Set up realia (objects that relate to daily living) and 3-D materials representing new trends. A life-size cardboard cutout of *Star Wars*' R2D2 would capture everyone's attention.

Utilize clear acrylic cubes, milk crates, or decorated boxes to spice up corners. Acrylic cubes are great for libraries that don't have enclosed display units and can be used to promote materials or programs. For example, a clever teen librarian used the clear acrylic cubes to promote a program. She wrote "It's a Girl Thing" on the cube in lipstick, and at the bottom of the cube she put flowered lime-green and white fabric. She also included a mirror, lipstick, and a box decorated with magazine clippings of school, boys, bands, sports, and so on. On the cube, she placed self-help-related books.

Different-colored milk crates can be used the same way and can be purchased at stores that sell home products. At times when I don't plan ahead, I use the acrylic cubes to cover the TRW prizes or candy prize I've purchased for a passive program giveaway. Prizes are the focus of the display, and I just surround them with related books. For libraries that don't have the extra cash to purchase cubes or crates, decorate different-sized boxes with magazine clippings or wrapping paper, stack them, and surround them with books. Stack boxes on a table in the form of a pyramid. Cover with a fabric and add materials around the boxes so they are at different levels. The next time you see a box of tissues that has colors or a pattern that you think you can use for a future display, buy it and get two uses out of it. I have used purple boxes with stars to add to a display promoting the fan-

## Display Ideas for Books with Bite @ your library



*Books with Bite:* Shark nonfiction and fiction titles or any animals that bite! (insects, bears, tigers, and so forth) Props: shark teeth, shark toys, photos of sharks, fish bowl, rocks, and shells.

*Read Every Bite:* Food-related fiction and nonfiction titles. Props: toy foods or nonperishable food containers, fake teeth, cooking utensils, baskets containing books.

*Love at First Bite:* Vampire fiction and nonfiction titles. Props: fake vampire teeth,



scary Halloween decorations, vampire mask, black paper.

*Love Bites:* Heartbreak romance fiction and nonfiction titles. Props: candy conversation hearts, red lipstick outline making a broken heart using acrylic cube, decorative red hearts, paper heart cutouts surrounding display or black poster with glued candy conversation hearts outlining a broken heart.

*Take a Bite Out of Life:* Biography titles. Props: fake teeth, pictures of animals, or people taking a bite.

tasy fiction collection.

Use posters to highlight a display. Use your wall space, backs of shelves, and end panels on shelves to hang your posters. I have also seen cork attached to poles to hang posters and flyers. Whether it is a TRW poster or a teen celebrity poster, posters are a good way to mark an area for teens. Hang posters with TV, music, sports, and any images teens relate to, just as you might see in a teen's bedroom. Browse the posters at the ALA Store (<http://alastore.ala.org>), ask music or video stores for free posters, or use poster

inserts from some of the teen magazines that are on their way to being withdrawn.

Using decorative paper and fabrics is another relatively inexpensive way to accentuate your displays. If you have slatwall, don't just display books on it—use wrapping paper or colored paper to enhance a theme. Cover boxes with colored fabrics depending on the mood you want to create. One summer I had a 1960s day program, so I placed a box on a table and covered it with a tie-dye fabric and surrounded it with sixties-related titles. If your library owns a die-cut machine, cut out shapes

that relate to your display, paste them on the shelves, and scatter them around the displayed books and the surrounding floor.

Cut out letters using wrapping paper or colored construction paper, print messages in computer fonts that can be used beside your displays to hook your audience. Try different scripts for your lettering. For example, create a graffiti wall. Use quotes and famous sayings. Try using humor by using wordplay and puns. In Mary Portas' *Windows: The Art of Retail Display*, Paul Smith states that you have just a few seconds to get someone's attention; visual humor is the most effective way. An idea I found from another teen librarian in my system was to tag books with little messages. For example, one tag reads "pick me" and other tag reads "no, pick me." Also, take advantage of trendy clip art to add pictures to your displays.

Some common mistakes to avoid when working with displays are overcrowding or overcluttering your display with too many props, undercrowding your display with too few props and materials, using inappropriate props so it doesn't convey the correct theme, and forgetting to change your displays. The creativity can be effective, whether it's complex or minimal. Props can also be costly, inexpensive, or even free. The potential for creative displays is limitless, so use what you can to the fullest to speak to your teen audience.

So, whether you have a fancy renovated space or a small area to work, you can attract teen readers to books through displays. Try these techniques to inspire and retain the readers you already have by helping them discover books they would not have sought on their own. It

may take extra work on your part, but the results are guaranteed to be satisfying. Teens will be coming up to you wanting to know if they can have the poster you put up on the wall or the cardboard-cutout figure you placed in the room. Teens will be leaving empty spaces where you had placed a face-out book that you thought was never going to be checked out. As teen librarians, we have to find a way to promote a collection to those reluctant readers or those teens that only come in to the library to use the Internet, hang out, or wait for their parents to pick them up after school. Using ideas from the retail environment and using what we know as librarians, we can sell reading to our teen customers. **YALS**

## Resources

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- Quitkin, Megan. "Cool Room: Life's a Beach." *CosmoGirl* (June/July 2000): 104–5.
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## Online Resources

- Advanced Graphics. [www.advancedgraphics.com](http://www.advancedgraphics.com) (May 18, 2008).
- Get Caught Reading. [www.getcaughtreading.org](http://www.getcaughtreading.org) (May 18, 2008).
- Clear Solutions. [www.clearsolutionsdisplays.com](http://www.clearsolutionsdisplays.com) (May 18, 2008).
- The Container Store. [www.containerstore.com](http://www.containerstore.com) (May 18, 2008).
- Flickr. [www.flickr.com/groups/bookdisplays](http://www.flickr.com/groups/bookdisplays) (May 18, 2008).
- Oriental Trading. [www.orientaltrading.com](http://www.orientaltrading.com) (May 18, 2008).
- Party City. [www.partycity.com](http://www.partycity.com) (May 18, 2008)
- YALSA TRW. [www.ala.org/teenread](http://www.ala.org/teenread) (accessed May 18, 2008).
- YALSA TRW wiki. [http://wikis.ala.org/yalsa/index.php/Teen\\_Read\\_Week](http://wikis.ala.org/yalsa/index.php/Teen_Read_Week) (accessed May 18, 2008).

## Further Reading

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- Nichols, Mary Anne. *Merchandising Library Materials to Young Adults* (Englewood, Colo.: Libraries Unlimited, 2002).
- Taney, Kimberly Bolan. *Teen Spaces: The Step-by-Step Library Makeover*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: ALA, 2008).

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