Letters to a Librarian

Prescott Public Library

Children

Letters to a Librarian

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Free

Byline

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Letters to Santa meets Blind Date with a Book in this fun new program offered at Prescott Public Library. From December 2nd to 13th, young patrons (pre-K—grade 12) wrote a letter to "Lady Librarian." Kids submitted their letters in the library's dropbox, including their name, age/grade level and favorite book topics (including their caregiver's name on the letter to ensure a library card is on file).

Our library “elves” matched them with two to three gift-wrapped library books, which patrons picked up between December 16th and 21st to enjoy during their holiday break.

Advanced Planning

The goals of the program were to increase engagement with families, children and teens as well as learn more about book interests to see how we could expand our youth and teen/young adult collections.

I started planning this event one and a half/two months in advance. I proposed the initial idea to the marketing committee for feedback and went through Blind Date with a Book logistics since I wanted a similar program structure. From there, I put together the website description and a form for an online submission option.

The main hurdle we worked through was determining how the books were going to be handled without giving away the names of the titles. Since the library has a Storytime card, I used that to hold books I was using to fulfill Lady Librarian letters.

Another logistic hurdle was we needed to ensure that folks had library cards on file before we fulfilled a letter request, so we added a caregiver section to our paper form that included a yes/no question about having a library card on file that we could then confirm using their name in our system.

Marketing

We posted information for the event on our social media (Facebook/Instagram) and website. On the first day of the event, we also posted the letter dropbox near the circulation desk, and librarians talked with patrons about it. We didn't know how many young patrons to expect or how folks would respond to this event. We ended up having 13 letters to Lady Librarian from young patrons ages 3-11.

Since this was a new program offered to patrons and for which we needed to determine the logistics, 13 was a great start. There was so much positive feedback from caregivers. Some of the young patrons couldn't wait to get to the car before they opened their book bags! One young patron went as far as the end of the hallway before they had to open their gift bag.

Budgeting

The only thing we may have needed to pay for was the gift bags, but I submitted a request on a local Buy Nothing Facebook page. Someone had a bulk collection of Amazon drawstring gift bags to donate, so the only cost for the program was time spent collecting titles, writing response letters to young patrons and making tags (with materials we already had at the library).

The dropbox was also built for free using a cardboard box and construction paper the library already had.

Day-of-event Activity

Patrons were told in the event description to write a letter to “Lady Librarian” about who they are, how old they are and what books they enjoy (topics and types). In addition to the online form, we had a paper form available for folks to take home with them. Others brought organic home-written letters to the library and dropped them in the dropbox. The paper form was (un)surprisingly the most common way in which young patrons submitted their letters.

Letters were accepted between December 2nd and 13th. Once letters were received, books were requested through our consortium or checked out from our collection, depending on how far along in the two-week event window they submitted. Once books were identified and received, each patron had a drawstring bag for the 2-3 books and a thank-you letter from Lady Librarian.

As each letter was fulfilled, a tag would be added to the outside of the bag (young patron’s name on the front and caregiver’s name on the back) and placed at the back of the circulation desk to aid librarians handling bags at checkout. From December 16th to 21st, caregivers could pick up the books their young patrons requested. When caregivers came to pick up books, a librarian would take the bagged books to the back office to check them out there so the books would remain anonymous until the young patron opened the bag.

One drawback was that if not all children in a family unit had their books fulfilled, the caregiver would need to return later to get the remaining bag(s).

Program Execution

I loved this event! It took a bit more time than I expected because I decided at the last minute to write thank you letters to everyone (which was really fun, especially if children expressed interest in topics that we had programs for, e.g., LEGO Club).

Thirteen was a great number for an inaugural event like this. All the feedback I heard was that everyone enjoyed the books they were given.

Advice

I would advise writing a press release to advertise the event and emphasize the need for a library card to participate. This could increase the number of cards distributed in the community to people who wouldn't otherwise sign up for one.

For larger volumes of letters, work could be delegated either by a number of letters (e.g., each person takes 10) or by task (e.g., one person requests books, one person bags and another writes thank-you letters).

Did you try this program at your library? Share your experience using this form.

Supporting Materials

Document
Lady Librarian thank-you letter.pdf
Document
Letters to a Librarian - Paper Form.pdf
Download this Program as a PDF

- Programming Librarian Facebook Group

Slideshow Images

Image









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Intergenerational+ | □□

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Young Author Talk Series

Audiences:

Intergenerational
Aug 20, 2024
Tweens (10-12)+ | $
Image



Book Bags 2 Go

Audiences:

Tweens (10-12)
Mar 13, 2024
Tweens (10-12)+ | □□
Image



Intergenerational Book Club

Audiences:

Tweens (10-12)
Adults (21 and up)
Intergenerational