



*"A house without books is like a room without windows."*

—Heinrich Mann

(1871-1950), one of the foremost German writers of the twentieth century, elder brother of Nobel Prize winning novelist Thomas Mann.

## *How Oklahoma Libraries are Good for Kids*

### *A Room with Windows*

Few people would disagree with the developmental importance of books and reading. Today, in a world beset by change, the importance of reading seems greater than ever. Children must become literate in the fullest sense of the word. The demand is for individuals who are rich in language, communication and technical skills—all of which grow out of reading. To prepare children, we must stimulate their curiosity and imagination, cultivate their learning potential, and encourage the habits of lifelong learning.

For many children the place where this happens—their house filled with books, their room with windows—is the local public library. With its wealth of books (more books than any one family can afford), the public library provides a fertile ground for the growth of young people. If knowledge is the key then a local library constitutes a brilliant opportunity. Public libraries offer children a chance to mix ideas, knowledge and hope.

### *Fun and Goosebumps*

The most dynamic area in many libraries is the children's section. The physical space might be a basement room, or it might be painted to look like a castle or a rocket ship. Whatever the appearance, librarians work to make the area inviting to kids and their parents. **Youth Services librarians, like Brook Jones of Alva Public Library, strive to allow children to create their own world.** Ms. Jones uses toys, games, and an inclusive at-

titude to create a fun place where everyone is welcome.

Today, most libraries offer a wide selection of children's books and magazines. Libraries also lend audio and video cassettes of children's books. Considered as complements to the written word, many tapes come bundled with books so children can follow along. As more books for children become available on tape, some libraries find lending recorded books to be a growing service. **At the Choctaw Extension Library, circulation in audio tapes has doubled this past fiscal year because of the popularity of books on tape. The Alva Public Library spent 20% of its children's budget on audio books, including bestsellers and such favorites as the *Goosebumps* series.**

### *Positive Influences*

More and more libraries employ a specialized children's librarian to help administer a variety of programs—ranging from story hours and summer reading programs, to homework help. Historically, librarians serving children and youth have been the vanguard of library progress. Experts consider them the originators of such ideas as library outreach, deposit collections of books, and bookmobile routes for rural areas. Most importantly, these dedicated individuals have proven powerful stimuli in the lives of children, supplying a mixture of attentiveness and encouragement. **Like many librarians, Alva's Brook Jones enjoys working around children and takes a genuine interest in their well-**



*"When you read, you want to learn more and more words. It tells you that you can do anything you want—you can get higher goals."*

—Muskogee Ten-year Old

**being while they're at the library.** She believes—and parents seem to agree—that public libraries have a definite positive influence on a child's development.

Extending that positive influence to communities, libraries commonly act as neighborhood centers serving as hosts to various clubs, civic and parent groups. **The Edmond Public Library worked this summer with the local 4-H sponsor to offer an aerospace camp**, where kids ages 9 to 13 learned about space travel and built model rockets. **In Enid, the public library and Sooner State Kennel Club sponsored a seminar** to launch September's National Dog Week with the aim of educating children about what they can do with and for their dogs. **A Tulsa library branch played host to the city's Snake Club.**

#### *Everyone's Access to the Future*

Computer literacy will be an essential attribute of the work force of the 21st century. A recent Michigan State survey of 525 businesses, industries and governmental agencies found that young persons without computer skills need not apply for new service sector jobs. To fill the need for computer knowledge, many libraries have held computer classes for children and adults. Many libraries are expanding their resources to include services designed to develop children's keyboarding skills and other computer familiarity. **The Anadarko Community Library currently has dedicated four computers to CD-ROM educational software, with more on the way.** Christina Owen, Anadarko's director, says that computers are playing

a larger role throughout the library. The library will soon have a total of fifteen computers with the majority configured for Internet exploration. Access to the Internet means access to the world, and librarians can help families find friendly sites that will help children grow.

#### *On the Road To Reading*

A classic outreach tool is the venerable bookmobile. **Dee Ann Ray reports that the Western Plains Library System always has at least one bookmobile on the road.** The daily trips eventually cover a 4,200 square mile area, with the longest being 160 miles round-trip. In rural areas, the bookmobile is the main library for some children. Typically, more than 50% of the stock of a bookmobile is children's books. Some schools use bookmobiles to augment school libraries. Ms. Ray remembers one particularly heavy user who recently won the Truman fellowship of the Oklahoma State University business school. Students use bookmobiles to research term papers, and this year the Burns Flat school won the state History Day contest doing their work through bookmobiles.

As with the bookmobiles of Western Plains, public libraries have long worked closely with local schools. Today, libraries across the state are likely to coordinate their shelving decisions according to classroom project plans. Students are taught how to use a library and encouraged to stop by often. **The Tulsa City-County Library promotes student research with a free seminar on how to create a winning sci-**

#### *Hennessey's Very Special Volunteer.*

Hispanic children had been coming to storytime at the public library and enjoying the activities, but they could not understand the stories—that is until twelve-year old **Valeria Zubia** volunteered to help. With assistance from her adult sponsor **Carolina Orozco**, Valeria organized and promoted a summer story hour for Hispanic kids. For eight weeks, Valeria and Carolina read to the children, led them in crafts, and supervised planned activities for as many as eighteen boys and girls.







**ence project.** Using local teachers as well as librarians as speakers, topics cover all the steps in a project, from choosing and researching a project to design and presentation. To assist home schooled children, many libraries offer support and continuing education opportunities for parents.

### *Brand New Volunteers*

Libraries are also playing a growing role in nurturing kids' community involvement. In some parts of the state, libraries are encouraging young people to volunteer as Junior Friends of the Library. Programs generally include a reading discussion group followed by volunteer work for their local library. The number and broad mix of children involved excites librarians. It's no longer just bookworms and "library weenies."

### **Muskogee has a new *Book Buddies* program to teach teenagers how to read to younger children.**

Teenagers will attend a seminar for certification, where they will learn the skills and tools needed to handle younger children—everything from patience and positive reinforcement to sounding out words. Once the program is running, the older students will be reading more, while earning service hour credit for their schools. The younger children might just get a role model.

### *From the Cradle On*

When it comes to the youngest children, evidence now suggests that full brain development requires being talked to, read to, and exposed to books—and to adults who read. With this in mind, a number of libraries have begun reading programs for pre-school children and their caregivers. **Leslie Langley, Poteau's Youth Services librarian leads a lap-sit program for children, newborn to three years old.** As many as 15 pairs of children and parents meet weekly to participate in finger play, rhymes, and reading. The five-year old program has eager new participants as well as parents returning with each new child in their family. Ms. Langley recounts the response of one young participant who saw her outside the library: "The book lady! Reading ... reading!"



*Summer Reading to Enthralled Listeners at the Newkirk Public Library*



*Kids Gathering Evidence with Charlie Blair, Director of Criminal Studies at Northern Oklahoma College*

For older kids, story hours and storytime continue to play a big role at most libraries across Oklahoma. Participants in these reading programs range from preschool aged children (four and five-year olds) to the adults who attended **Henryetta's Not For Children Only program**. Most of these programs go beyond reading and discussion to include activities; for example, **children at the Duncan Public Library learned to make their own bookmarks**. Storytime often incorporates speakers on books or related themes. Librarians have used story programs for outreach too, as they take reading to daycare centers, as well as inviting their visits to the library.

### *Budding Writers by the Hundreds*

In addition to reading, libraries are encouraging children to write. **The Public Library for Enid and Garfield County shepherds a regular poetry group of children in grades six through nine**. Starting out shy and reluctant, the young poets change after they have met a few times, and enjoy the support and respect of their peers. **Tulsa libraries have an annual Young People's Writing Contest for kids**, ages ten to eighteen, writing poetry, informal essays, short stories, and one-act plays. More than 400 youths entered this year.

### *It's Summer! Let's Read!*

An article about children and libraries would not be complete without discussion of the most extensive children's initiative at most libraries—summer reading programs. Nearly 30-years old, the Oklahoma Department of Libraries' summer program is designed to furnish incentives for school-aged children to read, and to provide entertaining and educational ways for children to pass the summer. The 1997 program, *Be a Super Snooper Sleuth at Your Library*, had 186 libraries throughout the state reporting participation. These libraries held over 3,000 storytimes or special events with 136,658 children attending. For the first time this year, libraries in the statewide program allowed children to set their goals, deciding for themselves how much or how long they wanted to read. Libraries offered a variety of incentives to encourage kids. **Libraries in the Metropolitan Library System offered tickets to Oklahoma City 89ers baseball and the Oklahoma Children's Theatre**. In the spirit of sleuthing, **Poteau's Buckley Public Library had a mystery prize**, with weekly clues about what was in the box (\$30 worth of 50-cent pieces).

Throughout the summer, mystery themes were

evident in presentations and activities. A variety of guests and performers were introduced to the kids. Some librarians created mysteries for children to untangle. **Carnegie Public Library devised a card catalog puzzle**, giving kids only a catalog number or a description with which to find a book. Broken Bow Library had children identifying animals from their tracks. **The Tahlequah Public Library hosted a free "Mystery Dinner"** (provided by the Friends of the Library) where guests could investigate an intrigue complete with appearances by mysterious characters. **In Pawhuska and Edmond, librarians encouraged children to write a mystery based on the Super Snooper Sleuth posters**.

Whether it's in a small town or a large city, there is a lot going on for children at your public library. Warm, inviting houses filled with books, libraries offer children opportunities for growth. Providing encouragement and support for children, public libraries offer a wide view filled with hope.



*Proud Participants of the  
Newkirk Public Library  
Summer Reading Program*



*Visit Kid's Connections at OK Kids for a current listing of Internet sites designed for kids, parents, teachers, librarians, and the young at heart.*



*Press here now to hyperlink.*