

# Reading Promotion Events Recommended for Elementary Students



"Well-meaning educators seek a prescription for increasing reading motivation among their students."

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One of the major professional goals of teacher librarians is to teach students a love of reading, so that they will independently choose to read throughout their lives.

This goal is not unique to teacher librarians; reading is a primary focus of many contemporary educational reform initiatives. The imperative to raise reading scores and to get every child reading at grade level is taking on even greater consequence in the context of high-stakes testing and laws that require summer school attendance or retention of third graders not reading at grade level by the end of the year. The purpose of this study is two-fold: (1) to expose issues resulting from the adoption of computerized supplemental reading programs, such as the limiting of student reading to books at specified levels, and (2) to offer teacher librarians an alternative to computerized supplemental reading programs in the form of a year-long list of reading promotion events that include practices known to increase intrinsic motivation for reading.

Well-meaning educators seek a prescription for increasing reading motivation among their students. As a result, many schools have turned to computerized supplemental reading programs such as Accelerated Reader and Scholastic Reading Counts. Within these programs, books are assigned levels and point values based on readability formulas that measure text difficulty related to word length, sentence length, and number of words, among other criteria. Student progress is determined by the passing of short, fact-based tests on each title. Some schools provide extrinsic rewards to students for reaching specified point values within the testing system. The publishers of these programs state that for the programs to be successful, schools should permit children to choose the books they read and provide children 20 minutes or more a day of sustained silent reading time. As

often happens, however, wide adoption of a particular educational approach introduces distortions to the intended implementation, in this case limiting a child's reading to only those books calculated to be at a particular level. Then, to make time for computerized test-taking on the titles read, the time previously allotted to free reading is abbreviated. Rather than exposing children to the wide range of books that might match their interests, or to the intrinsic rewards of reading—the joy of getting lost in a book or inspired to pursue a topic further—rules have been created that may actually dampen enthusiasm and create expectations for immediate outcomes not guaranteed to be present later in life.

In fact, studies have shown that, in spite of the increased time students spent reading while participating in these programs, computerized supplemental reading programs did not increase their motivation to read (Huang, 2011; Smith & Westberg, 2011). This finding affirms many teacher librarians' concerns about these programs, particularly programs implemented in a highly restrictive manner that

limits students' reading choices to a particular level. These inadvertent consequences create self-defeating circumstances where ultimately what is being promoted is instead inhibited. This leads to the question, "How can teacher librarians help increase the reading motivation of students?"

Contrary to the restrictive approach of some computerized supplemental reading programs, many studies have found that intrinsic motivation and student choice are practices linked to increases in students' reading for pleasure. Studies show that intrinsic motivation, more so than extrinsic motivation (Justice, Piasta, Capps, & Levitt, 2013; McGeown, Norgate, & Warhurst, 2012; Pavonetti, Brimmer, & Cipielewski, 2002), along with teachers who value and model reading for pleasure (Carey, Howard, & Leftwich, 2013; Gettys & Fowler, 1996), can help students understand that reading is not only valuable but can also be enjoyable (Mathers & Stern, 2012). While extrinsic rewards can temporarily increase motivation, the long-term effects do not indicate lasting impact on students' reading habits (Pavonetti et al., 2002).

Likewise, student choice of reading material is essential to student engagement in pleasure reading. Sanacore (1999) concludes that free choice in reading develops a self-determination and ownership for all readers. Similarly, Krashen (2004) found that students who choose what they read and have an informal environment in which to read tend to be more motivated, read more, and show greater language and literacy development. Although research indicates students' abilities to understand the short- and long-term importance of reading (Hall, Hedrick, & Williams,

2014; Mathers & Stern, 2012), often students only see reading as pleasurable if they are able to read books that are interesting to them, are available in a variety of formats (Ciampa, 2012), and are not dictated by curriculum or teacher (Hall et al., 2014). Furthermore, Hall and colleagues (2014) found that maximizing opportunities for student choice of reading materials increased their involvement in reading and helped them engage in conversations about the book selections.

Through these studies, it is clear that students need time, resources, and support from teachers and other adults to afford them the opportunity to read for pleasure, stressing the importance of intrinsic motivation and student choice when selecting books. School librarians are uniquely poised to provide this for students. Providing reading promotional events through the school library is one way to create a culture of reading. Teacher librarians promote reading for "pleasure, information, and exploration" and provide an environment "where independent reading is valued, promoted, and encouraged" (AASL, 2010, para. 3). AASL (2010) acknowledges that such an environment includes "opportunities specifically designed to engage young people in reading and opportunities that involve caregivers, parents and other family members in reading" (para. 3).

With the goal of providing teacher librarians a selective list of practical and effective reading promotion events, we searched a wide range of teacher librarian journals, blogs, websites, and electronic discussion list archives for terms such as *readers' advisory*, *reading guidance*, *booktalks*, *reading promotion*, and *library events*. The following list is the outcome of analyzing events sug-

gested in at least two sources and vetted by teacher librarians, indicating their potential popularity and effectiveness. Events to span the school year were selected for inclusion in a calendar of yearly reading events based upon the following criteria:

The primary audience for the event is students in kindergarten through sixth grade.

Events are free or very low cost.

Events are not tied to extrinsic rewards (e.g. tokens) but may include literacy related rewards (e.g. books).

Events can be implemented or launched in one day but are more comprehensive than a single author's birthday and may include follow-up lessons and discussions over a week or month.

Events promote recreational reading interests that do not duplicate curricular topics.

New or experienced teacher librarians may use this calendar to support their leadership through outreach to classes, school family nights, library newsletters, and other communications. With a goal of implementing at least two new events per month, a teacher librarian may use events from this list in conjunction with other events that stem from classroom curricular areas (such as Youth Art Month in March, during which students might connect with the library by making book jackets, or using STEM day in November to promote outstanding books for science). Having multiple events from which to choose allows teacher librarians to create a rotation every other year or more so students do not become bored by the same events year after year. Note that each annotation features a brief history of the event, followed by suggestions for implementation (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Calendar of Yearly Reading Events**

September	
<p>International Dot Day  <a href="http://www.thedotclub.org/dotday/">http://www.thedotclub.org/dotday/</a>                      Inspired by Peter H. Reynolds’s <i>The Dot</i> and celebrated September 15, the event has reached over 120 countries whose teachers are inspiring their students to make their mark by trusting their own abilities. Teacher librarians can read this book to students and then participate in activities outlined in the free online educator’s handbook. <i>The Dot</i> can be displayed along with the other books Reynolds has written or illustrated.</p>	<p>Talk Like a Pirate Day  <a href="http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/top-teaching/2014/09/celebrate-talk-pirate-day-your-classroom">http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/top-teaching/2014/09/celebrate-talk-pirate-day-your-classroom</a>                      Although originally intended for adults, the day may be celebrated with songs, games, book selections, and much more for junior pirates. Teacher librarians can use September 19 to encourage pirate vocabulary (selectively), invite students to wear pirate gear and choose a pirate name, play pirate mad libs, and browse the display of books highlighting known pirates of the past, modern-day pirates, and other books with sea adventure themes.</p>
<p>Banned Book Week  <a href="http://www.bannedbookweek.org/">http://www.bannedbookweek.org/</a>  <a href="http://www.ala.org/bbooks/frequentlychallenged-books/top100">http://www.ala.org/bbooks/frequentlychallenged-books/top100</a>                      This event was launched in 1982 and created in response to a large number of books being challenged in libraries, bookstores, and schools. Students can learn about the freedom to read, visit displays for books, discuss why books are challenged and the implications of banning them, and hear the teacher librarian read from a favorite challenged or banned book.</p>	<p>Library Card Sign-Up Month  <a href="http://www.ala.org/conferenceevents/celebrationweeks/card">http://www.ala.org/conferenceevents/celebrationweeks/card</a>                      This is celebrated by public libraries each September to encourage community members to see what the library can offer them. If the public library is within walking distance, the teacher librarian can collaborate with the librarian to give tours of the children’s area, hand out library card sign-up information, promote programming, and invite the public librarian to the school to read to the students and share about upcoming events.</p>
October	
<p>Read for the Record  <a href="http://www.jstart.org/campaigns/read-for-the-record">http://www.jstart.org/campaigns/read-for-the-record</a>                      Jumpstart is an organization that supports language and literacy for preschool children in low-income neighborhoods. Their global campaign Read for the Record is for children and adults worldwide to participate in the world’s largest shared reading experience by reading the preselected title in an effort to break the world reading record for the most people reading the same book on the same day. Teacher librarians can schedule read-aloud times with classes or get multiple copies of the book, so several classrooms can have their own read-aloud sessions. This could also be used to introduce the <i>Guinness Book of World Records</i> and fuel discussions about world records more generally.</p>	<p>National Hispanic Heritage Month  <a href="http://www.readingrockets.org/booklist/books-hispanic-heritage-month">http://www.readingrockets.org/booklist/books-hispanic-heritage-month</a>                      A September 15 to October 15 celebration of positive influences of Hispanic Americans, the month opens with the mid-September anniversary of independence for Mexico and several Latin American countries and closes with Columbus Day, observed October 12. In addition to displaying books related to historical and cultural aspects, such as the Mayan language and traditional dances, teacher librarians can invite students to adopt a world city and transform the library into it. This can be informed through the use of primary documents (maps, photographs, writings) from the National Archives (docsteach.org) to explore experiences of Hispanic Americans, spanning the 1700s to the present.</p>
November	
<p>Family Literacy Day  <a href="http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/calendar-activities/celebrate-national-family-literacy-20681.html">http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/calendar-activities/celebrate-national-family-literacy-20681.html</a>                      This event is celebrated November 1 and throughout the month to focus on special activities and events that showcase the importance of family literacy programs. Teacher librarians may invite parents, grandparents, and other family members to the school library for a family–school reading night that may be held in conjunction with parent teacher conferences to spotlight the library program.</p>	<p>World Kindness Day  <a href="https://www.randomactsofkindness.org/for-educators/kindness_in_the_classroom">https://www.randomactsofkindness.org/for-educators/kindness_in_the_classroom</a>                      The Random Act of Kindness Foundation encourages acts of kindness. Students may visit a local care facility to read to the residents or record themselves reading books and share the recordings with a facility at a distance. Alternatively, retired community members could be invited to the school and paired with students to share books together. Teacher librarians can read books with the topic of kindness, such as <i>The Mitten Tree</i> by Candace Christiansen; display books that highlight characters showing kindness; and encourage kindness-related activities, such as making kindness cards to be given to others when acts of kindness are observed.</p>

<p><b>Picture Book Month</b>  <a href="http://picturebookmonth.com/">http://picturebookmonth.com/</a>  Each November, countries around the world celebrate picture books. Using the website to provide students with a vast array of activities, teacher librarians can promote this event to all ages. Suggestions include displaying picture books, keeping a running total of picture books checked out, Skyping with a picture book author, and having local celebrities or administrators read their favorite picture books.</p>	<p><b>International Games Day</b>  <a href="http://igd.ala.org/">http://igd.ala.org/</a>  On the third Saturday of November, libraries around the world celebrate this event from the American Library Association, the Australian Library and Information Association, and Nordic Game Day. Teacher librarians can raise awareness about gaming in the library; bring together gamers; host games of all kinds, including board games, video games, and card games; and display books on card games, magic tricks, Lego building, and Minecraft.</p>
<p>December</p>	
<p><b>Caldecott, Newbery, Geisel Book Awards</b>  <a href="http://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia">http://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia</a>  These are awarded in January by the Association for Library Services for Children. The Newbery (1922), Caldecott (1938), and Geisel (2006) awards honor the most distinguished American children's book, picture book, and book for beginning readers published the previous year. Promoting past award winners in December builds excitement for the January announcement and provides students reading suggestions for the winter break. Teacher librarians can promote the reading of medal winners and honor books by displaying these and other ALA children's book award posters of past titles, booktalking, showing book trailers, and providing bookmarks with award titles.</p>	<p><b>Letters About Literature</b>  <a href="http://www.read.gov/letters/">http://www.read.gov/letters/</a>  Started in 1992, this annual writing contest is for readers grades 4–12. Students choose a book or poem about which they have strong feelings, reflect on how the author's work changed their view of the world or how and why they are different than before they read the work, and write a reflective letter about it to the author (dead or alive). Letters go to the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress. Winners are announced in mid-April and recognized during presentations in May and June. The deadline for submission is mid-January, so teacher librarians should introduce this contest to students in December to ensure students have time to write quality pieces. Teacher librarians can display books discussed in past entries as inspiration for future book selection.</p>
<p>January</p>	
<p><b>Science Fiction Day</b>  <a href="https://www.daysoftheyear.com/days/science-fiction-day/">https://www.daysoftheyear.com/days/science-fiction-day/</a>  On January 2, to correspond with the birthday of Isaac Asimov, a famous science fiction writer who is credited with writing or editing more than 500 books, teacher librarians can discuss the genre of science fiction, display Isaac Asimov children's titles along with books by other science fiction authors, and invite students to booktalk to their peers their favorite science fiction novels.</p>	<p><b>Multicultural Children's Book Day</b>  <a href="http://multiculturalchildrensbookday.com/our-programs/mccbd-2016-classroom-reading-challenge/">http://multiculturalchildrensbookday.com/our-programs/mccbd-2016-classroom-reading-challenge/</a>  January 27, 2016, was the first day set aside to raise awareness of children's books that celebrate diversity and to get more of them into classrooms and libraries. Besides displaying books or Skyping with authors, teacher librarians can encourage classroom teachers to sign up for the MCBBD reading challenge and be given a free multicultural book for their classroom library for completing the challenge, sponsored by the Jr. Library Guild.</p>
<p>February</p>	
<p><b>Groundhog Job Shadow Day</b>  <a href="http://www.educationworld.com/a_curr/curro50.shtml">http://www.educationworld.com/a_curr/curro50.shtml</a>  Just as Punxsutawney Phil looks for his shadow on February 2, U.S. workers often have "shadows" as they encourage youth to job shadow them to allow for an up-close look at what a "real job" is like and how their education plays a key role in their future. Teacher librarians can celebrate this day by inviting local professionals into the library to talk about their jobs, provide a wide selection of nonfiction books, and promote databases and websites covering careers.</p>	<p><b>Black History Month</b>  <a href="http://www.readingrockets.org/calendar/blackhistory">http://www.readingrockets.org/calendar/blackhistory</a>  Each February, communities and schools recognize the history and contributions of African Americans. Teacher librarians may participate through the NCTE's African American Read-In event to read from books by African American authors and illustrators or host author, illustrator, or storyteller visits in person or streamed online. Book displays may showcase strong African American characters and nonfiction books about influential people of African descent.</p>

<p>Presidents' Day  <a href="http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/unit/presidents-day-everything-you-need">http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/unit/presidents-day-everything-you-need</a>  This holiday was originally established in 1885 to recognize President George Washington and is now celebrated the third Monday in February to recognize all U.S. presidents, past and present. Teacher librarians can encourage students to read nonfiction about the presidents by displaying books from the collection, booktalking, and reading aloud. Students can dress as their favorite president, make president-related crafts in the library, and view a video highlighting U.S. presidents as they browse for books.</p>	<p>World Read Aloud Day  <a href="http://www.litworld.org/wrad/">http://www.litworld.org/wrad/</a>  LitWorld was founded in 2007 by Executive Director Kim Allyn after she visited a community of extreme poverty in Kenya and saw the desire of children to read and write. Based on the belief that literacy is a universal human right, World Read Aloud Day was established in 2010 and is celebrated in February or March. Teacher librarians can read aloud to students, pair older and younger students to read aloud to each other, invite community members to read aloud to students from their favorite childhood books, or read aloud with an author via Skype.</p>
<p>March</p>	
<p>Read Across America  <a href="http://www.seussville.com/Educators/educator-ReadAcrossAmerica.php">http://www.seussville.com/Educators/educator-ReadAcrossAmerica.php</a>  Sponsored by the National Education Association and celebrated annually on March 2, Dr. Seuss's birthday, students can read a variety of Dr. Seuss books, dress as their favorite character, and even eat Dr. Seuss-inspired snacks. This event may be celebrated all week, with the school participating in dress-up days that correspond with Dr. Seuss books, such as inviting students to wear silly socks on the same day that a local celebrity, such as a business owner or the mayor, reads <i>Fox in Socks</i>.</p>	<p>Children's Choice Awards  <a href="http://www.bookweekonline.com/">http://www.bookweekonline.com/</a>  Giving children the opportunity to voice their opinions on books being written for them through their state's Children's Choice Book Award program, student voting takes place from March to May, with winners announced live during Children's Book Week in May. The longest-running national literacy initiative (since 1919), Children's Choice Awards often feature bookmarks and posters that teacher librarians can display with current and past winners. Booktalks, book trailers, and live broadcast of winners may be presented or streamed online.</p>
<p>April</p>	
<p>D.E.A.R. (Drop Everything and Read)  <a href="http://www.dropeverythingandread.com/">http://www.dropeverythingandread.com/</a>  Originally celebrated on April 12 in honor of Beverly Cleary's birthday, who wrote about D.E.A.R. in <i>Ramona Quimby, Age 8</i>, D.E.A.R. is now celebrated the entire month of April. Teacher librarians can coordinate with classroom teachers to promote a day-long event where students dress in comfortable clothing, bring pillows and blankets, listen to relaxing music, and read. Each hour or each day a different genre can be introduced and new selections offered, for example, using the Nonfiction Monday blog slogan "Facts First Nonfiction Mondays." Students are encouraged to record their time spent reading, and Beverly Cleary books may be given away as prizes.</p>	<p>School Library Month  <a href="http://www.ala.org/aasl/slm">http://www.ala.org/aasl/slm</a>  Every April since 1985, the American Association of School Librarians encourages teacher librarians to create activities to promote their program as a way to celebrate the vital role that strong school library programs play in transforming learning. Teacher librarians can use this event to encourage students to utilize the library not only for leisure reading but also as a place to collaborate on projects, conduct research, explore their interests, and ask questions. A wide variety of technology, databases, and books can be displayed; a slide show could be created highlighting student collaboration using these resources and past and upcoming library events.</p>
<p>National Poetry Month <a href="https://www.poets.org/national-poetry-month/home">https://www.poets.org/national-poetry-month/home</a>  Held every April since 1996 and first introduced by the Academy of American Poets, the month is dedicated to celebrating poetry with events taking place in school classrooms, libraries, and bookstores. Teacher librarians can showcase the National Poetry poster, involve students in the Dear Poet Project, celebrate National Poem in Your Pocket Day, display books of poetry, highlight authors of children's poetry, and have poetry readings.</p>	

**Star Wars Day**

<http://www.starwars.com/may-the-4th>

May Fourth has become the unofficial Star Wars holiday and is celebrated with the phrase, “May the Fourth Be With You!” Students can dress as their favorite *Star Wars* character, make *Star Wars* crafts and snacks, build with *Star Wars* Legos, and browse the selection of *Star Wars*, astronomy, and space books on display.

**Free Comic Book Day**

<http://www.freecomicbookday.com/Home/1/1/27/992>

On the first Saturday in May, independent comic book specialty shops around the world give away at least one free comic book to anyone who comes in their stores. In the days leading up to Free Comic Book Day, students can be introduced to the unique features of a comic book that appeal to both boys and girls, as well as reluctant readers; shown examples of popular comics throughout the past century (a local collector could be invited); and given information about local shops participating in Free Comic Book Day.

## CONCLUSION

Teacher librarians often experience a conflict of interest in regard to supporting reading instruction. The goal is to collaborate with classroom teachers and support instruction across the school, yet many aspects of how programs such as Accelerated Reader and Scholastic Reading Counts are implemented within buildings disrupt the teacher librarian’s attempts at encouraging reading autonomy, reading for pleasure, and self-guided inquiry. When classroom teachers dictate the level of the books their students may borrow from the school library or encourage their students to read for the prizes or privileges they can earn rather than for the enjoyment of the experience itself, it may dampen students’ enthusiasm for reading. One way to balance the imposed structure and dictates of supplemental reading programs is to create a school culture of reading that goes beyond taking tests and earning points. Through hosting schoolwide reading promotion activities, like those featured here, teacher librarians help to motivate students to read more, read more widely, and experience reading as a series of enjoyable events rather than as a compulsory or isolated activity.

By doing so actions are built on the research related to reading motivation that repeatedly reinforces the importance of free choice and enjoyment of the reading experience. Through creating a school-wide reading program, that is a series of integrated events and activities for the entire school and school year, featuring reading as a key component, librarians showcase reading as a fun social experience to be shared with others.

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## YA NONFICTION

## WORLD WAR II

Braum, Eric. **Trapped behind Nazi Lines: The Story of the U.S. Army Air Force 807<sup>th</sup> Medical Evacuation Squadron** (Encounter: Narrative Nonfiction Stories). Capstone, 2016. 224p. LB \$14.88. ISBN: 9781491480427. Grades 6-9. Here is the story of how military workers found themselves behind enemy lines. The survival and rescue of the men and women gives a real-life perspective with primary-source quotes and photographs. Features include maps, timeline, source notes, glossary, and index.

Edwards, Sue Bradford. **The Bombing of Pearl Harbor** (Essential Library of World War II). ABDO, 2016. 112p. LB \$35.65. ISBN: 9781624037917. Grades 6-12. This narrative account of the bombing and how it changed the United States is presented with photographs and primary sources, a glossary, selected bibliography, source notes, and an index.

Ellis, Catherine. **Key Figures of World War II** (Biographies of War). Rosen: Britannica, 2016. 108p. LB \$27.95. ISBN: 9781680480573. Grades 7-12. Introductory chapters include causes leading to the war and information about the battles. Following are biographical sketches of military and political personnel. War-time photos provide added interest, concluding with a glossary, bibliography, and a detailed index.

Offord, Alexander. **The Causes of World War II** (World War II: History's Deadliest Conflict). Crabtree, 2016. 48p. LB \$31.32. ISBN: 9780778721161. Grades 5-9. World circumstances changed after WWI, with a growing economy while Germany faced poverty. The suffering by the Germans brought about the rise of the Nazi Party, Adolf Hitler, and WWII. Other titles in the series cover the important battles and people. Photographs and fact bars enhance the layout concluding with a timeline, further reading, glossary, and an index.

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