

Programming Ideas for Teen Librarians: Apocalypse Prepping 101

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In the midst of a global pandemic, it can be difficult to design Covid-friendly programming for teens. Restricted social interaction and increasing isolation are affecting people everywhere (Government of Canada, 2021). In such uncertain times, it's easy to feel lost, overwhelmed and powerless. Despite the challenges of organizing around Covid-restrictions, libraries have the chance to address this. In this article we will explore a few programming ideas that will hopefully help teen librarians link literature and current world events in order to organize thoughtful, fun, and empowering programs for teens.

The majority of these programs can be facilitated online in some capacity or another. Please remember always to be cautious and follow the appropriate Covid-19 protocol for your area.

Covid-19 & Mental Health

The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has presented a whole new set of challenges and at times it can feel almost like we are living through the end of days. This, of course, comes with mental health ramifications - and while libraries are not hospitals or crisis centres, it is the perfect opportunity to partner with relevant organizations to bring teens the help they need.

The library acts as that perfect third-party space, it's unthreatening, discreet and approachable. By partnering with local mental health services, youth outreach programs, and schools, libraries can offer online wellness clinics where trained professionals can dispel some of the myths that accompany mental health and begin to teach important wellness skills. By acknowledging how things are changing during the pandemic and helping teens to expand their emotional and mental toolbox, we both introduce teens to the services that are available to them and set them up to succeed.

Along a similar vein, libraries can partner with these same local health clinics, hospitals, and even researchers in the medical field to host virtual, judgement-free teen-only Covid Q&As. Outreach can be done through school programs and clubs, and the Q&As can be paired with librarian-lead sessions on information literacy. In an online world where it becomes increasingly difficult to understand what is true and what is fake, such sessions could bring distressed-teens some peace of mind and empower them to be able to make sound health decisions on their own.

Leadership & the Library

Information and health literacy is not the only way to empower teens through tough times. Leadership programs are a great way to teach teens important life skills and have fun at the same time. This kind of program could foster community partnerships and provide contacts for teens entering the workplace. Libraries could partner with universities, local governing bodies, small businesses and even inspirational speakers and activists in order to organize events. Teens would

be able to choose the parties they were interested in, and even partner with them for themselves in order to put off any number of events or activities.

Sessions could combine online and distance events with covid-safe in person components depending on the geographic in which the library is located and the resources which they have available to them.

Leadership programs would be easy to tie into the dystopian and post-apocalyptic theme. Many books and games in the genre feature strong, young heroes standing up for what they believe in and saving the day. By holding sessions that foster this leadership, libraries can empower teens to become confident leaders in their own community and help enact the change they want to see.

It's the End of the World and We Know It

Of course, teaching realistic life skills that teens are interested in is important, but it is equally important to provide programming that is a little less serious, and a little looser. Dystopian and post-apocalyptic YA reads can be bolstered by apocalypse themed events.

A common feature of apocalypse films and literature is the idea of the “prepper”, somebody who has prepared for the worst long before the end of days ever arrived (Merriam-Webster 2021). These characters are not uncommon in film, literature, and other media, and are often the ones waiting on their porch with a shotgun and a basement full of canned beans.

By learning the survival skills and techniques seen in our favourite dystopian and post-apocalyptic YA fiction, we let teens put themselves in the protagonist's place, and try being the main character in their own story! Librarians can partner with wildlife or search and rescue organizations in their local area to teach lifesaving skills like how to start a fire, build emergency shelters, forage for food, and even basic first aid. While these are technically life skills, it's also a lot of fun.

Final Thoughts

In conclusion, while the themes in dystopian and post-apocalyptic novels might be heavy, that doesn't mean that fun and educational programming can't be designed to serve the teens who love to read them.

Further Reading and Resources:

**Bruce. (2021, March 18). COVID-19. Retrieved March 28, 2021,
from <https://mentalhealthliteracy.org/covid-19/>.**

This website offers mental health resources for all walks of life, and even takes into consideration the current, ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. It's dedicated to expanding on mental health literacy everywhere.

Common sense emergency preparedness. (2021, February 27). Retrieved March 28, 2021, from <https://theprepared.com/>.

This website is completely dedicated to apocalypse and crisis preparedness. It details the basic rules of preparing for the end times, and even has a few good articles on excellent survival-themed movies.

References

Government of Canada, S. (2021, March 04). Impacts on mental health. Retrieved March 28, 2021, from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-631-x/2020004/s3-eng.htm>

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Prepper. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved March 28, 2021, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/prepper>