



# YA THEIR WAY

A summer reading program that builds  
relationships between libraries & teens

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## Introduction

Our library hosted its first ever summer reading Teen program in 2004. The Collaborative Summer Library Program theme that year was “Discover New Trails.” We presented the program to them in the form of a “Coupon Book.” This was a stapled booklet of reading, creative and research challenges for them to complete and turn in for prizes. As they turned in their coupons, we put them into a large box drew one from the box at the end of the summer to determine the winner of the Grand Prize. Twenty-two teens signed up that first year and turned in almost 300 coupons. By the second year, teens started showing up before the last day of school to ask when they could get their summer Coupon Book, and by year three, our number of participants had tripled. We now usually average between 60 to 80 sign ups from our small community whose graduating class size is typically around 50 students.

### Challenge:

The biggest problem we anticipated when starting our teen summer program was getting them to participate when so many spend those months working, leaving to visit non-custodial parents, going away to camp, hanging out at the lake and all the many other things that take up a teen’s time. We also knew that a part of our teen demographic would be made up of both chronically reluctant readers and stronger readers who were reluctant to commit to a reading program during their summer break from school work. We needed something that would address all of those needs as well as be satisfying to the avid readers whose participation would be easier to get. And we needed it to be affordable!

### Solution:

First and foremost, the Coupon Book does not need to be done on any set schedule. Teens can take it with them if they go out of town and turn their completed coupons in when they return. They can finish the whole thing in a week, if they choose, or they can dabble with it every now and then when they’re in the mood. There’s little pressure associated with the Coupon Book and they are free to choose how much or how little they want to do. Of course, our hope is that once they do a little they’ll be hooked and

want to do a lot more! Secondly, it's portable and compact. Everything they need to participate is all in that one booklet. While we do host several teen events during the summer, their attendance is not required in order for them to be a part of the summer program.

### Philosophy:

This low pressure approach is a better fit in the life of a busy teen as well as making it more accessible to the reluctant reader. Since the Coupon Book contains more than reading challenges, a teen can participate without reading a single book all summer. "But it's a READING program!" you say. As librarians we want them to discover the joy of reading, but the reluctant reader isn't likely to willingly sign up to be force fed something they might think of as "hard" or "boring." Any level of participation they do will require them to practice their ability to read and comprehend instructions, work on their digital literacy skills as they research the answers to trivia questions, and make regular visits to the Library to turn in their coupons. During one of those visits, they may just discover a book that does reveal to them to the joy of reading.

Another note about reluctant readers – we're always careful how we pitch the summer reading program to them. Knowing that their negative self-talk might include things like "I'm not good at reading" or "I hate reading," we don't want to reinforce that by making them think we are judging them negatively. So, when we show them the reading coupons in the Coupon Book, we nonchalantly mention that they can do as many of those as they want, or do none of them at all if they're feeling a little burned out on reading after the school year. No big deal. No pressure. Just have fun, kid!

Meanwhile, we aim to make the Coupon Book equally satisfying to our avid readers. One big way we do that is by including ten Reading Coupons in each booklet and then letting the participants know that they can ask for more if they run out. There's no limit on how many Reading Coupons they can turn in, so long as they are books they read within the time frame of the summer program. The more books they read – the more entries they get into the drawing for the Grand Prize! We also find that our avid readers enjoy doing the other coupons as well!

## Constructing the Coupon Book

A Coupon Book is made up of a cover, introductory pages of explanation, adverts for our teen events and ten each of the Reading, Creative and Trivia Coupons. If you're like us and like the idea of counting how many of each type of coupon is turned in after the program is over, make your life easier by printing the three categories on differently colored paper.

Each year, we try to come up with some clever version of the coupon book that fits, albeit with a good dash of creative license, into the Collaborative Summer Library Program theme. For example, when the theme was "One World, Many Stories," we made the book look like a small pocket guide to the planet earth and pretended the teens were newly arrived aliens from space who would use it to learn about our world. We even included a page that was their passport that we stamped when they received their coupon book. If that sounds daunting, though you can keep it simple and it will still be fun.

The first couple of years, we printed the coupons ourselves and stapled them together. After that, we decided it was worth the extra cost to have them produced by a print shop so that they came out with cleaner cut edges. In truth, however, the Coupon Book doesn't even really need to be packaged into a booklet form. You could put them all in an envelope, secure them together with a binder clip, or wrap a rubber band around them. You might also choose not to staple them together into a booklet for creative reasons. For "Get in the Game" we printed the coupons on small cards and packaged them in a playing card box and for "Libraries Rock" we put them in paper CD envelopes.

Sometimes, on the back cover of the booklet, we include a bullet list that explains how the program works. This is particularly helpful if you want to hand out the Coupon Books on-the-go as you can flip the book over and use this list to remind you of what highlights to hit and makes it easier for everyone (if there is more than one person working at your library) to easily understand, explain, and register participants.

## Back Cover Bullet List

- Sign up to receive your Coupon Book.
- Inside you'll find coupons for reading books, completing creative projects and answering research questions.
- Fill out each coupon and turn it in for a small prize and an entry into the End of Summer Grand Prize drawing for [insert your prize here]
- You don't have to do all of the coupons.
- You don't have to do the coupons in any particular order.
- The more coupons you do, the more entries you'll get in the drawing for the Grand Prize.
- Turn in your coupons as you complete them. Get them all in before [insert program end date].
- You don't have to come to the party to win the Grand Prize.
- We'll have events all summer long – they will be fun but they are not mandatory!

## Anatomy of a Coupon:

Every coupon should include a place for teens to write their name and a description of the challenge they need to complete in order to turn their coupon in. For the coupons that prompt them to write something or create a piece of artwork, fill the blank space on the coupon with a statement along the lines of “Complete your project on a separate piece of paper and turn it in, along with this coupon, to the Library.” If they put it on the coupon, it will end up in the coupon box until the end of summer Grand Prize drawing, and it’s nice to be able to display the entries in the Library to market the program to others! Often, we make a scrapbook that we continue adding their creations to as they turn them in during the summer. We leave the scrapbook out where patrons are welcome to flip through it, next to the box that teens drop their coupons into for the Grand Prize drawing. The coupon box is another place where you can get creative, making it look like a robot or a fish tank. Whatever it is, it just needs to be sealed and have a slot cut into it big enough to slip a folded coupon through.

We make our coupons 4.25 x 5.5, which is a letter sized piece of paper cut in half. When we’re creating the coupon template, we put two identical coupons on each page as we’ve found this makes it easier later when assembling the book. The printing company we use especially appreciates this because they can stack the pages in their proper order and cut them all in half at one time.

You can create your coupons to be read in portrait or landscape orientation, but however you do it, be mindful of which edge you’ll be stapling as you’ll want to leave an extra large margin there to make cutting or tearing the coupons out of the book easier. Teens need to be able to get them out so they can turn their finished ones into the Library!

## The Cover

We like to make the front and back covers of our Coupon Books out of cardstock to make the booklets a little more durable, but that isn’t absolutely necessary. The front cover includes the name of the summer program, our Library’s name, appropriate clip art, the year and the age range for the program. Currently our “teen” program is for children ages 11 – 18.

## Introductory Pages

On the first page, we welcome teens to the summer program and give a brief explanation of how it works.

“This booklet is made up of coupons containing reading, creative and research challenges. Work your way through them at your own pace and in whatever order you would like. As you complete each coupon, turn it in at the Library for a small reward and an entry into the drawing for this summer's Grand Prize. You don't have to do all of them, but remember – the more you do the better your chances are of winning!”

On another page, we describe the three different types of coupons that are available for them to complete. This can be simple and straight forward or you can try to tie it into the summer theme. For the Reading Coupons you could just say that they need to complete one for each book they read during the summer, but if your theme is superheroes you might say something like “When not using her secret identity to fight crime, Barbara Gordon spends her days working at the Gotham Public Library. Fill out a Batgirl Coupon for every book you read this summer.” Here, also, is where we note that they can get more reading coupons if they run out.

If you're hosting teen events and have your dates and times locked down, include one or more pages to advertise your programs. Make sure to include the date and details for your end of summer get together where you will do the Grand Prize drawing. We always stipulate that the winner need not be present to win since we want everyone to have a chance, even if they can't attend the event.

## Reading Coupons

Each coupon asks teens to record the title and author of the book they read, to give the book a rating from 1 to 5 stars and to write a brief sentence explaining why they did or didn't like it. These are meant to be for books they read within the time frame of the summer program. They can re-read a book they've enjoyed from the past so long as they do so within the program's time frame.

We don't have any requirements about what books they choose to read, the reading level, the number of pages, or whether or not they have lots of illustrations in them. So it's true that reading Anna Karenina earns you the same prize as reading a Manga book and that may seem unfair to some, but it's not meant to be that kind of competition. Each teen will have their own reading interests and abilities and our only wish is for them to put their individual best into what they're doing.

### Creative/Activity Coupons

These are the coupons that prompt teens to do some creative writing, artwork, and other interesting activities. Make it fun for them and YOU since you'll be the one looking at all of them! A couple of our personal favorites:

- The Good Samaritan coupon. We've included this one in every Coupon Book since year one and love reading what they come up with. This coupon tells them to "Do a chore at your home that is normally done by someone else without them asking you to do it. Write down the name of the person you help and what chore you did for them. What was their reaction?"
- One year, one of our librarians tested their intelligence gathering skills by challenging them to collect certain pieces of information the next time they interacted with a member of the service industry like a sales clerk or food server. The thought of them having to pretend to be "under cover" while they tried to find out the person's first name and their hair and eye color amused us and so we had a lot of fun reading those coupons!

When coming up with the creative challenges, we try not to assume everyone has access to art supplies or nice blank copy paper on which to draw. We go with a more open-ended statement like "draw and color a portrait of yourself dressed as a pirate" instead of saying "make a watercolor portrait." Sometimes we'll specify that a project has to be completed on a letter-sized piece of paper just to coax teens into putting a certain amount of effort into it, but many times we leave it up to them. Some will turn their work in on small, torn pieces of notebook paper, and that's okay.



Trivia/Research Coupons

Since everyone doesn't have internet at home, we make almost all of the trivia questions ones they could theoretically look up in a book or use a library computer to find the answer. One year, we used the encyclopedias in our reference section to create every trivia question.

We accept answers that are "close enough" so long as it seems they've applied some effort. If they are completely off base, we return their coupon to them and let them try again.

We create questions that are of varying degrees of difficulty because of the wide range of ages (from 11 to 18 year olds) who participate in our teen program. Here's a fun one: ask them which key on a keyboard is the "carriage return!"






Book Review

Your Name : \_\_\_\_\_


Book Title : \_\_\_\_\_

Author : \_\_\_\_\_

Using a scale of 1 – 5, with 1 being "sadly disappointing" and 5 being "excellent!", circle how many shells you think this book deserves.



Briefly explain why...



A Book Coupon for “Make Waves at Your Library.”

## Some Creative/Activity Coupon Ideas

- Make a collage.
- Describe an interesting dream you've had.
- If we could time travel, do you think we should? Explain.
- Write a poem that includes all of these following five words (provide them list of words)
- Draw a line connecting a group of the stars to form your own original constellation. Give it a name. (Print a spattering of random stars on the coupon)
- Create your own pirate themed menu.
- Create your own travel brochure to the planet Mars.
- Create an poster advertising your cure for scurvy.
- Create a new chess piece of your own design. Draw what it looks like and explain the rules for how it moves on the board.
- Find a coin with your birth year on it.
- Pick three people and choose a different virtue from the list below for each of them that you feel they exemplify. Explain your choices. (Include a list of virtuous qualities for them to pick from)
- Draw a picture of the creature who could have made these tracks. (Include a picture of an animal track, the stranger looking the better)
- Borrow from chalk from the front desk and do some chalk art on the sidewalk outside the library. Show it to a librarian to complete your coupon.
- Give the title and author of a book you think the library should add to its teen collection.
- Tell a librarian a joke.
- Draw a picture of what you think a car in the year 2099 might look like.

- Complete this crossword puzzle (print a puzzle on the coupon)
- Make your own crossword puzzle.
- Draw your own maze puzzle.
- Make your own word find puzzle.
- Listen to an audio book.
- Eat something you've never tried before. What was it? Was it better or worse than they expected it would be?
- Watch a black & white movie. Write down the title.
- Draw a floor plan of your dream house.
- Write a short story based on the following prompt (provide writing prompt)
- Write a song to the tune of Jingle Bells.
- Write a poem about the library.
- Spend 30 minutes reading out loud to a parent, sibling, friend or pet. What did you read? Who did you read to?
- Make something out of playdoh or clay (include recipe for flour dough clay)
- Make a mobile.
- Ask a parent, grandparent or guardian the name of one of their favorite books from when they were a kid.
- Suggest a teen event you wish the library would host.
- Write a descriptive paragraph that starts with the following line: (provide them an opening line)
- Write about a time listening to music made you feel better.
- Draw a picture of your pet, or a pet you wish you had.
- Find three pebbles or stones - one blue, one red and one yellow one.

## Prizes

The biggest prize they won't even realize they are getting is your attention! When they come in to drop off their coupons, that's your opportunity to praise and admire their creative projects, talk to them about the books they've read, and recognize their hard work in answering a difficult trivia question. Every coupon turned in is an opportunity to make a positive connection between teen and librarian. Which, in turn, helps them develop a stronger relationship with their library.

### The Prize Box

Each summer we have a prize box that teens can choose from every time they turn in a coupon. These are just meant to be small incentives, since their coupons will also be going into a drawing for the Grand Prize that's given away at the end of the program. With continually rising costs, and a potentially large number of coupons being turned in, it takes increasingly more effort every year to keep this affordable. We keep our eyes open for bargains all year long in anticipation of the summer program.

Our prizes are usually a mix of items costing from .10¢ to \$1.00 with the goal of averaging about .50¢ per item. If 400 coupons are turned in, that will cost us \$200 in prizes. You can bring your costs down by adding a few handmade items. For example, one year, we purchased affordable charms that we strung on black ribbons to make very inexpensive necklaces. Another affordable do-it-yourself idea is decorative metal bookmarks that can be purchased in bulk, and have a hole you can loop some ribbon through.

If your budget is really tight, you can forgo the prize box and focus instead on the chance to win the Grand Prize. Another option is to do as we did the first couple of years when we gave them a prize for each of the first ten coupons they turned in, and after that, they were just turning more in to increase their chances at the Grand Prize. You could also just have a large candy jar (with some packages of Mott's fruit chews and boxes of raisins thrown in) which you can fill with sweets purchased affordably in bulk.

### Some Affordable Prize Ideas

Pencils, pencil sharpeners, colored pens, scented pens, decorative metal skeleton keys, small journals or note pads, gently used teen books you've received as donations, nail polish, bookmarks, key chains, candy, boxes of crackerjacks, pendant charms, scented hand lotion, mini tool sets, bracelets.....and any other random items you find on sale throughout the year! Think ahead by checking those post-holiday clearance shelves, and hit up your local discount store!

### The Grand Prize

We usually offer a Grand Prize of \$100 cash and make that a big part of our pitch. "Sign up and YOU could win \$100!" If your budget doesn't accommodate that much, you could offer a smaller cash prize or purchase something affordable that you think will appeal to them.

There are also other ways to make it special without it having to cost a lot. For example, if you have a budget of \$40, the prize could be an after-hours pizza party hosted at the library for the winner, and a select number of their friends and family – maybe make it pizza and a movie if you have the ability to screen a DVD. Maybe you have next-to-no budget and patron computers with time limits? The Grand Prize could be a pass to use the computer with NO time limits for the next year.

Mostly, you just want something, ANYTHING so that they have a goal to work towards, something that they want to keep finishing more coupons for so they can earn more entries into the drawing.

We always stipulate that the winner doesn't need to be present at the drawing so as not to exclude teens that aren't able to attend our events. That said, we have started surprising the attendees by drawing for smaller second- and third-place prizes that the winners MUST be present to win. We do this because it can make for an anticlimactic ending if the Grand Prize winner isn't in attendance.

## Your Total Cost

The number of small prizes you'll need is hard to predict. We've had from 300 to 900 coupons turned in during different summer programs. If 50 teens sign up and 2/3 of them turn in an average of 15 coupons each, you'd need less than 350 small prizes. In the estimates below, we've calculated for 500 prize box rewards. You can look at the options and tweak each line item to fit your need. You may, for example, opt to splurge on outsourcing the printing of your coupon books, but then tighten down your budget on the prize box – or even skip the prize box all together and focus only on the drawing for the Grand Prize. If you plan to host teen events and/or an end-of-summer party, you need to add those costs to your estimate.

### **\$680 Budget**

This option includes prizes for a second- and third-place winner, a more generous budget for prize box rewards, and sending the Coupon Books to an outside printer.

\$175	50 Coupon Books assembled at a print shop
\$375	500 prizes at .75¢ each on average
\$100	Grand Prize (winner need not be present)
\$30	Runner up prizes (do need to be present)

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\$680

### **\$303 Budget**

Print coupons in house. You'll make 50 coupon books with 35 pages in each. This total assumes you fit two coupons per sheet and your library's cost for paper and toner is .10¢ a page. If your in-house printing costs are already covered under a different line item in your overall library budget, you may not even need to factor this cost into your summer program spending.

\$88	50 homemade coupon books
\$165	500 prizes at an average of .33¢ each
\$50	Grand Prize

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\$303

**\$193 Budget**

Print coupons in house and put three on each sheet of paper, making each one the dimension of a business-sized envelope. Prize box is a candy jar filled with affordable bulk sweets and some healthier alternatives included.

- \$58 50 homemade coupon books with 3/page
- \$85 Candy Jar prizes
- \$50 Grand Prize

**\$193**



Questions or comments? We're here to help!

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