



# A Hook and a Book

## Rewards as Motivators in Public Library Summer Reading Programs

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Summer reading programs (SRPs) in public libraries have been a stalwart of programming for youth for more than a century.<sup>1</sup> These programs are intended to encourage students to continue reading throughout the summer, practice communication skills, and develop a lifelong voluntary reading habit—a love of reading—in the context of a safe and friendly learning environment.<sup>2</sup>

Research by Bogel, Matthews, and at Dominican University indicates these programs not only contribute to boosting students' reading skills but also help moderate the summer reading setback (a major part of summer learning loss) that often occurs, particularly in students living in poverty.<sup>3</sup>

Summers offer students myriad ways to spend their time, from day and residential camps to local community and organizational recreational and cultural programs and from school-based learning activities to public library reading programs. To compound this problem for public libraries, they find themselves in competition with commercial enterprises, including bookstores, restaurants (e.g., McDonald's), and even banks (e.g., TD Bank) that offer attractive incentives to “hook” young readers during the summer.<sup>4</sup>

As a result, in recent years some public librarians have formed the belief that to compete, they must offer students a variety of incentives just to attract their attention and motivate them to register for library-sponsored summer reading programs. To measure participant success, libraries often frame that success quantitatively; i.e., the number of books or pages that summer reading program participants read, the amount of time students spend reading, and sometimes they might even give students some type of reading assessment (both before and after participation) as evidence of vocabulary and comprehension gains. This gives a picture of quantity but does little to highlight the quality outcomes of such programs (reading motivation, enjoyment, and satisfaction), related to impact on their young constituents.

In addition, public libraries may provide students with a system of rewards, first as a recruitment vehicle to attract students to their summer programs and then extending those rewards throughout their participation. For example, a San Francisco Public Library advertisement stated, “Everyone who reads at least forty hours gets one entry to the ‘super raffle,’ where the prizes include an iPad 2s, Kindles, and \$100 Sports Basement gift certificates.”<sup>5</sup>



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All around them, children today have become accustomed to and even have come to expect rewards for anything they do (e.g., parents paying them for reading books, schools implementing reading programs like Accelerated Reader [AR] that provide a range of prizes for achieving set reading goals). These incentives and extrinsic rewards have become commonplace in almost every context of children's lives, including libraries.

This article takes a closer look at the types of library summer reading program (SRP) incentives and rewards offered by two urban public library system summer reading programs in New York and Ohio during summer 2013 and describes their impact on participants' reading motivation and behaviors. We interviewed young participants in the program, their parents and also surveyed public librarians from across the country to gather a broader perspective on reading incentives and rewards and SRPs in general. Finally, we use the results of our findings to provide some recommendations for when and how to motivate participants' engagement in summer reading programs with and without rewards.

## Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation is the enthusiasm to engage in a task for its own sake out of interest or enjoyment; it is the basis of authentic human motivation. Intrinsic motivations are more individual, longer lasting, and more meaningful because they are personal to each individual. The rewards of intrinsic motivation are typically personal feelings of accomplishment or satisfaction at the completion of a task (e.g., reading a challenging book or the complete works of an author). It energizes and sustains behavior resulting from the satisfaction felt as a consequence of accomplishing a task and attaining one's personal internal goals or expectations.<sup>6</sup>

Intrinsic motivation contributes to the development of lifelong learning. Producing students who are motivated by their own sense of pride in their learning accomplishments and achievements, rather than by some external reward, is one of the overall goals of education.<sup>7</sup>

Decades of research on intrinsic motivation, notably by Deci and Ryan at the University of Rochester, has identified three major requisites to creating learning environments in which students are intrinsically motivated—autonomy support, perceived competence, and relatedness. When autonomy support is provided by a learning environment, learners are given choices and independence to explore and discover, based on their needs, interests, and curiosity. Perceived competence is developed in an environment in which there is the opportunity for learners to successfully build the skills needed to participate in such programs and activities. Relatedness refers to a learning environment in which learners can interact with others who positively reinforce and impact their attitudes and behaviors for learning or performing a task or activity.<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, extrinsically motivated learning environments are those that are formed by external consequences,<sup>9</sup> typically some type of tangible reward system or prize, such as candy or money or even a grade. These reward systems focus the learner's attention on a product that results from specific learning performance and accomplishments, often disregarding effort or progress toward accomplishing their learning goals. As a result, the goal becomes the prize, rather than the learning, and when the prize is withdrawn, the learner becomes de-motivated and may not even participate.

## Rewards and Incentives for Reading

B. F. Skinner's and other behaviorists' research on reinforcement found that when a reward follows a behavior (e.g., ring the bell, get the treat), that behavior is likely to be repeated.<sup>10</sup> If reading were simply a mechanical, repetitious skill, then this behaviorist approach might have some positive, long-term outcomes. But reading and other learning tasks are much more than that; reading is a personal activity that should result in aesthetic pleasure, knowledge gain, or both.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, giving extrinsic rewards for reading sends the learner a message that the task or behavior is not, in and of itself, interesting and valuable; rather it says that the task must be in some way unpleasant or disagreeable, since a reward is required to make them do it, and also that reading becomes the means to an end (the reward) rather than its own reward.<sup>12</sup>

Most of the research on the effects of extrinsic rewards on intrinsic motivation has demonstrated the following:

- Extrinsic rewards intended to control behavior are ineffective and can undermine students' self-esteem and motivation.<sup>13</sup>
- When there is little intrinsic motivation to begin with (e.g., the task is boring or repetitive), using extrinsic rewards can be effective initially for helping a student internalize and identify with the value of such tasks.<sup>14</sup>
- Extrinsic rewards have a short shelf life and should be used thoughtfully and judiciously.<sup>15</sup>
- Some activities provide their own inherent reward, so motivation for these activities is not dependent on external rewards.<sup>16</sup>
- If rewards are used, they must be ones that students find interesting and relevant to the task or else the desired behavior will never occur, or falter quickly, when the behavior is achieved.<sup>17</sup>
- Children who receive rewards for reading subsequently have less interest in reading, unless the reward is a book.<sup>18</sup>
- Quality-dependent extrinsic rewards could increase rather

than decrease feelings of competence and thus be less likely to suppress intrinsic interest, thereby reinforcing the positive behavior of the intrinsically motivated student.<sup>19</sup>

- If a person is already intrinsically motivated, once the rewards are removed their intrinsic motivation is actually likely to decrease.<sup>20</sup>
- Unexpected rewards can be highly motivating.<sup>21</sup>
- Expected rewards can reduce motivation when the person is already intrinsically motivated for the task.<sup>22</sup>

Research by Cho and Krashen found several factors that influence the development of a long-term reading pleasure habit for second-language learners, including identified access to books, having a time and place to read, being able to select what they read, and absence of external incentives.<sup>23</sup> In a reading context specifically, “a program that turns vacation reading into something one has to do to obtain a reward is hardly likely to produce children who have ‘learned to love books.’ Quite the contrary.”<sup>24</sup>

However, this issue is not truly black or white; that is, we’re not always totally intrinsically or totally extrinsically motivated. While many people believe that in a particular situation, one is either intrinsically or extrinsically motivated, Ryan and Deci found that people vary in the types and amount of motivation they exhibit and that a person can fall anywhere on a continuum from being truly self-regulated (highly intrinsically motivated) to being totally externally controlled (highly extrinsically motivated).<sup>25</sup> Their research also revealed that, while intrinsic motivation is a very personal trait, it is subject to external influences (e.g., social conditions), which can be either supportive of or destructive to the development of intrinsic motivation.

For example, a student can be highly motivated to read out of curiosity and interest (intrinsic), or because he wants to receive the prize the library is offering (extrinsic), or somewhere in between. If a participant in a summer reading program reads because she understands that reading will likely result in improved reading skills, even when prizes are offered, it may be considered more intrinsically than extrinsically motivated. When a librarian unexpectedly provides a reluctant reader with positive verbal feedback (praise) about his reading competence, although the praise is extrinsic, it is based on authentic competence and quality rather than on simply time spent on the activity or even just showing up for the activity. In this case, “providing feedback” (based on performance) is likely to fall into the more intrinsically motivated “camp.”<sup>26</sup>

In this study, we explored how incentives and rewards for participation in public library summer reading programs affect the intrinsic reading motivation of middle school student participants. This exploration was part of a larger study, conducted by researchers at the Center for Digital Literacy at Syracuse University, on public library summer reading program outcomes for youth in two public library systems in the state of Ohio and New York.<sup>27</sup>

That research, among other things, found that program participants believed their reading competence was positively affected by their participation. The current study looks at the affective side of summer reading programs and the impact of incentives and rewards on participant motivation for reading.

## Methods

We investigated the effects of extrinsic rewards on young participants (entering sixth through ninth graders) in public library summer reading programs in two library systems in different states. Twenty-two of sixty total participants volunteered to be interviewed, and twenty-four parents of those sixty participants volunteered to participate in a survey using SurveyMonkey, an online survey creation and analysis tool.

To not influence the experience of participants during the programs, researchers waited until the conclusion of the programs in both library systems to conduct the participant interviews and to administer the parent surveys. In addition, to gain a broader perspective on the use of extrinsic rewards on public library summer reading program participants from public librarians nationwide, public librarians were recruited for an online survey made available via the [publib@oclc.org](mailto:publib@oclc.org) professional electronic discussion list. (Because the librarians from the two participating library systems in this study had been privy to the purpose of the study and other information that would bias their responses, they were excluded from participating in the online survey.) A total of 292 public librarians nationwide voluntarily completed this survey.

## Results

The results of this research revealed that both library systems’ programs participating in the study used incentives to attract students to their programs, and additional extrinsic rewards were used to keep them motivated throughout the program. Of the 126 different types of rewards provided to participants in the two summer reading programs in this study, the data revealed that 105 (83 percent) were unrelated to reading (e.g., baseball tickets, bracelets). It was also discovered that, while most participants received at least one reward, several received none. Rewards reflected a wide variation—pencils, erasers, books, journals, tickets to sporting events, small toys, sweets (e.g. ice cream, candy), cancellation of penalties (e.g., library fees and fines), water bottles, posters, t-shirts, plaque, flashlights, restaurant gift certificates, and trinkets. As the results of this study will demonstrate, the impact of these rewards on participants’ enjoyment of and motivation for reading also varied widely.

## Participants

Interviews were conducted and recorded via telephone with a volunteer sampling of twenty-two (of sixty) young participants

(grades 6–8) following completion of the summer program and subsequently transcribed for analysis purposes. A content analysis of interview data revealed participants have a wide variety of reading interests, from mysteries to science fiction to fantasy. Most respondents indicated they enjoy reading for pleasure and often read to satisfy their curiosity about a topic. When investigating a topic of interest, a few respondents mentioned going online and searching websites for information and one even mentioned listening to podcasts on an iPod. There wasn't much interest in watching TV for information, except for sports, and in one case, a respondent mentioned watching History Channel documentaries.

When asked whether they would start in the fiction or nonfiction section in the library when researching a topic, most said nonfiction because they like to start out by looking at the facts and real events. Some also showed an interest in reading fictional books about a chosen topic as well, but fiction was not always their first choice.

Participants were asked to describe their library's reward system. Below are some of those responses in order to demonstrate the variation of rewards and typical criteria for success in those reward systems. Some of the responses seem to indicate a continuum for rewards from cumulative rewards directed at reaching one's goals to reading a certain amount (of pages, of minutes) to simply reading.

You would set yourself a goal, and you read a certain amount of books and then you would log onto the computer, and you would go and find your name and they would look you up and they would tell you how many prizes you had won for the week and, if you reached your goal for the week, you would receive your prize. Then you would put your name on a raffle ticket and put it in a can of your choice in which you wanted to win every week.

I thought it was reasonable that for every chunk you did you got a small prize, but once you got a big part of it done, you got a bigger prize. So every time you did a little thing you got a little prize and every time you did a big achievement you got a big prize.

Well actually . . . you just had to read and show that you did read; it didn't matter how much. So as long as you read, you got a prize because there was a prize of the week. Anyone could get that prize.

Participants were then requested to offer their opinions about the impact of the library summer program's reward system on their reading attitudes and behaviors. Responses reflected a range of attitudes about rewards and summer reading programs. For some participants, the focus was on the rewards and the effects on their reading behaviors related more to the amount of reading and attitudes related to an interest in reading, rather than selection or resulting satisfaction.

I guess I'm reading a little bit more [interested] now because like I said before I got into different choices of things like now I'm kind of interested in old classics, like different things like that. Like classical famous books.

I think that it worked well because it kind of got me to read more because I wanted to get the prize. . . . I'm pretty sure you didn't have to read that much to get the prizes, but either way I still tried to read before I got prizes.

For others, the rewards seemed to affect how participants felt about themselves, indicating the rewards made them feel like they were accomplishing their goals, as in these examples.

After getting the reward I felt very proud of myself that I won the prize out of everyone who participated, I also felt that prizes are a great incentive to get children to read and participate in the summer reading program (it certainly got me to join).

One participant simply stated, "The rewards made me feel accomplished."

Although positive toward the rewards in general, one participant expressed concern when the library ran out of rewards (stickers) Some participants thought rewards were a nice addition to what already was a pleasurable activity and encouraged them to read *more*. For example:

I thought they [rewards—books, candy, or trinket] were fun. I thought the rewards were definitely an incentive to read. My mom's never really had to push us to read because we all like it, all of my sisters and I. So, but I thought that it was also just a nice incentive to do what I like to do. It definitely helps me to read more when I had an incentive to read that why I would spend twenty thirty minutes a night just going through a book. So that definitely increased how often I read.

I don't think they ever affected my enjoyment of reading because I mean I really like reading but I think they affected like my motivation maybe I kind of thought I would set like a time I would read for an hour and try to like to finish like maybe 10 chapters or something so it was kind of like it gave me priority and kind of set my schedule almost.

Others expressed mixed or negative feelings about the rewards.

I thought they [rewards] were ok. I really just love to read; [reading] is the best part for me.

I received a coupon for a free slice of pizza at the local [pizzeria]. . . . Getting a reward wasn't really that special; I would have read with or without the summer reading program at my library. I thoroughly enjoy reading, so the prizes don't really "entice" me, they are just an extra for reading that I could do without.

When you get the prize, people are just reading to get the prizes and when you reading just to read, you are reading for a reason.

Finally, participants were asked if they would have participated if the summer reading program had there been *no* rewards. While most participants said they would participate because they already love to read and were avid readers, some also mentioned other factors about the summer reading program that motivated them. Here are some of their responses.

Definitely, because I sometimes have a hard time judging like what books I might want to read and I sometimes have hard times finding books so that but then with suggestions from kids and people who read books suggested for my age or someone my age, it really helped to limit what books I should read and what books I shouldn't read or would be more interesting to me.

Yeah I probably would have because I just like to read and I like I just like to track the reading and everything about it . . . the prizes don't even have to be there for me.

But a few students felt differently about participation if rewards were withdrawn. Here are a couple of examples.

I probably would have [participated] yes, but I probably wouldn't have read as much or done as much stuff.

No, I would not have [participated], I just would have read, because I read no matter, if I'm being rewarded for it or not. I just read.

In summary, when asked about the impact of extrinsic rewards on their participation in the summer reading program, some participants liked receiving rewards and others found the rewards nice but irrelevant to their motivation to read. Some said they would have participated without the rewards because they love to read, while others indicated they probably wouldn't have participated in the program if there were no rewards but would have read anyway. So, while the rewards were viewed positively, in most cases they seem to have had little or no impact on whether the child read over the summer.

## Parents

After both summer reading programs were concluded, parents of the interviewed participants were invited to complete an online survey that included a question about the appropriateness of giving rewards to participants in summer reading programs. Two-thirds of the twenty-four parents of participants who were surveyed thought giving rewards was *always* appropriate (sixteen) or *usually* appropriate (four), while three considered it *somewhat* appropriate, and one believed it was *not at all* appropriate.

Parents were asked their perceptions about the benefits of their child's experience in the summer reading program. All parents felt their children had enjoyed participating in the program and 94 percent (twenty-two) believed their child thought summer reading was important. The importance of choice as a prerequisite for intrinsic motivation was supported by 94 percent (twenty-two) of parents who acknowledged that it was their child's choice to participate and all (100 percent) agreed that their children had the choice of what books they read over the summer. One commented, "Book selection was independent of librarian's influence for the most part." In addition, two-thirds (67 percent; sixteen) felt their child had read more over the summer due to their participation in the program. One stated,

Summer reading allowed the children to find new authors and areas of the library as one year there was a scavenger hunt type assignment where to complete the task the book had to be from a particular section or genre. It was a great way to discover all of the resources beyond the age appropriate section. Proved to be very helpful in years to come!

Sixty-one percent (fourteen) believed it was *very true* or *usually true* that their child's reading skills had improved as a result of the program. One parent noted, "My [son] had trouble reading until he started reading Star Wars books," while fifteen (63 percent) thought their children felt *more confident* about their reading ability as a result of participating in the summer reading program. One parent described in a somewhat humorous manner how her son's summer reading experience made a difference in his attitudes toward reading:

My middle child is a very reluctant reader. . . . In encouraging (or forcing) him to read, he has come across some books that he has enjoyed. Much to his surprise he discovered that not all books were horrible. He is still not an enthusiastic reader, but he will admit that not all books are terrible and will voluntarily read, and re-read certain authors and series. He may never be a book enthusiast like the rest of us, but as long as he continues to improve his reading skills and is able to find something he enjoys sometimes, I'll consider it a win.

When asked about rewards and incentives offered through the program, some parents acknowledged that their children *enjoyed* receiving the rewards. One stated, "My seven year old boy . . . enjoys the prize chest to pick from after reading ten books" while another said, "My youngest son is not a strong reader and he loves getting free books to take home and read."

Fifty-four percent believed their child read more *because of* the rewards and the same percentage indicated that their child would have read the same amount *despite* the rewards and incentives. When asked if they thought the types of rewards offered to their children for summer reading were appropriate, 84 percent (twenty) agreed that they were *always* or *usually* appropriate.

Finally, parents were given the opportunity to share any stories or anecdotes that help illustrate any difference the summer reading program made in their child's reading behaviors and attitudes. The following comments describe the impact of summer reading programs on their children:

Even after ten years plus of participation my son still looks forward to joining the summer reading program. It is an official part of the summer ritual! The trinkets become part of the fun, chilling out aspects of the summer days! It becomes reading for enjoyment, not as dictated by school! Eager anticipation for my son which fosters his enjoyment and appreciation of the library and its place in the wider community it serves.

And one parent simply stated, "The program has kept (my children's) love of reading alive."

## Librarians

Three hundred sixteen public librarians who directed summer reading programs volunteered to take the online survey; of those, twenty-four were deemed unusable (e.g., incomplete, resided out of United States) and were eliminated from the analysis. Thus, 292 of those online surveys were analyzed for this study. Participating librarians serve in urban, suburban, and rural libraries across the country, representing a wide variety of library communities and geographic locations by US time zones (see table 1).

Four questions (out of twelve) on the online survey sought the perspectives of public librarians on how incentives were used in their summer reading programs.

### Q4. How do you/your library attract participants to your summer reading program? (check all that apply) (*n* = 285)

One of the nine choices was "Incentives (e.g., prizes)." Eighty-six percent (244) of librarian respondents acknowledged that their libraries used incentives to attract participants to their summer reading program. One librarian described an end-of-program event was used to entice at least one young participant.

### Q7. If your summer reading program provides incentives for participants, what do participants have to do to earn them? Rewards are based on (select all that apply) (*n* = 270)

The most common responses to this question were quantitative in nature. "Amount of time spent reading" (70 percent; 188) and "number of books read" (49 percent; 133) were cited as the most common ways participants could earn rewards during the summer reading program but "participating in activities" was also cited by 36 percent (105) of respondents. Ten percent (twenty-six) responded "Other." Only 1 percent (two) of respondents chose "Not Applicable (No rewards given for participation in our summer reading program).

Table 1. Public Library Survey Participants by Location and Community Type (*N* = 385)

	Pacific States	Mountain States	Central States	Eastern States	Total
Urban	9 (13.24%)	11 (16.18%)	22 (32.35%)	26 (38.24%)	68
Suburban	12 (8.82%)	13 (9.56%)	45 (33.09%)	66 (48.53%)	136
Rural	5 (6.17%)	12 (14.81%)	32 (39.51%)	32 (39.51%)	81

### Q8. Below are two examples of rewards that have been offered at summer reading programs. Choose the one you think participants in your program would be most likely to choose. (*n* = 263)

When asked whether their young participants would likely choose a reading-related (e.g., free book) versus a nonreading related (e.g., coupons for ice cream treats) reward, 57 percent (150) indicated that their participants would more likely choose a free book, while 43 percent (113) indicated that coupons for ice cream treats would likely be the preference. One librarian said, "Last year, a mother approached me and told me her son was reading below grade level at the beginning of the summer reading program, but the motivation of prizes and library visits encouraged him to practice his reading much more. By the end of the summer, his reading level ability had increased three grades. She attributed it all to SRP."

## Recommendations for Best Practice

The use of incentives and rewards has become commonplace in public library summer reading programs. Consequently, it is important for librarians planning and implementing these programs to understand the potential short-term positive effects and long-term negative effects that these kinds of incentives and extrinsic rewards can produce.

Based on participant data, parent data, and the motivation literature and supported by responses (ninety-seven) to the final, open-ended question of a survey for public librarians nationwide (Q12: **Are there any stories or anecdotes that you can share that help illustrate the difference the summer reading program has made in one or more participant's lives?**), this final section provides some recommendations for best practice regarding the use of rewards in public library summer reading programs.

1. **Relevant rewards given to students with low intrinsic motivation can have long-term positive impact.** If rewards are based on quality (e.g., challenging her reading level or selecting a genre he never read before) and are not controlling and the rewards are gradually removed, shifting the emphasis to the individual student's progress and accomplishment, students can begin to move from an extrinsic to more of an intrinsic orientation.<sup>30</sup> While about half of the parents of those participants in summer reading programs in this study said they believed their children read *more* because of the prizes, none said they read *better* therefore there was a perceived quantitative difference but no evidence of a qualitative difference. While reading *more*

certainly can lead to higher reading skills, there are other factors that may play a role (e.g., the challenge of that reading, how interested the child is in the story or subject of the book). Below is a librarian's comment.

In 2009, we began offering the choice of a free book to children in preschool through fifth grade after they read twelve hours. I watched a ten-year-old girl go through the prize selection at her branch. She asked the librarian for something else, so the librarian brought out the entire supply box and the girl looked through that box too. Finally, she found the book she wanted. She hugged the book to her chest and bounced on her toes with excitement, and I felt she was truly rewarded!

2. **Provide choices.** Give participants opportunities to choose books to read that are relevant to their interests and to set personal reading goals.<sup>29</sup> Both of these factors were mentioned by program participants, as well as the fact that the summer reading programs helped them discover new authors and genres. A librarian said, "More than one child has said, 'You mean I don't have to take a test? I can read anything I want?' The schools here use AR (Accelerate Reader, a commercial school reading incentive program), and judging by these comments, summer reading is probably one of the few times where the kids feel free to follow their own interests."
3. **Build variety into a program that meets the reading and information needs of participants.** Variety captures attention and fosters engagement in an activity.<sup>30</sup> The young participants mentioned how much they were engaged by the game-like style of their summer reading program. Creating summer reading programs that include activities that capitalize on current trends and popular interests, rather than relying on rewards to engage them, can have a stronger impact on intrinsic motivation.

I have many kids that tell me that they "don't like" reading and thus would not participate, but then their eyes light up when I tell them that it's more than just reading. We have a LEGO design contest each summer, and we give awards out for the most creative. Usually I put out a display of LEGO books at the same time and they fly off the shelves with these same kids that "don't like" reading. I think it's something important to remember when we think about "reading." Most kids don't differentiate between reading for fun and reading for school.

4. **Design programs that stimulate students' curiosity and interest.** Fostering students' curiosity in ways that trigger situational interest can lead to deeper-level, well-developed individual interest that doesn't require rewards for participation.<sup>31</sup> An initial activity that sparks students' interest and involvement can be used to motivate continued interest and participation. Some parents mentioned that librarians had

introduced their children to books that they were interested in reading and this increased their reading behaviors. One librarian cited an activity that exemplifies such a program.

We had a night creature expert from a local camp provide our opening SRP, which was very well received with parents and children. Many found books to read on the subject, and the children are still coming in the library in December and looking for books on nonfiction subjects to satisfy their curiosity. Usually some of the children are reluctant readers, and it would be hard to find a book they want to read, but now they will ask or go searching for their book of interest on their own. Improved library skills and reading skills.

5. **Create connections between public libraries and schools to motivate participation in summer reading and other public library programs.** This requires open channels of communication that facilitate interactions and the forming of common goals.<sup>34</sup> Coordinating and collaborating between school and public librarians can create links between what students experience in school and the activities available during a summer reading program at the public library, making those activities and rewards (if any) highly relevant and motivating. In the example below, the librarians describes how the unexpected recognition this young girl received for her participation in her public library's summer reading program helped her feel good about her accomplishments.

A fifth-grade girl, who said she was not interested in reading any books over the summer, came because of the activities for her age group that she heard about during a classroom visit. She was challenged to read just three books over the summer so that she could come to the final celebration. She didn't want to read but wanted to attend the program. She loved the first book of the recommended series and ended up reading the rest of the series. She was honored as one of (the library's) Super Readers, and all of her family congratulated her after her mother posted her award picture on Facebook. She was very proud of herself.

6. **If rewards must be given, provide rewards related to reading.** As demonstrated in much of the participant data above, when rewards are not related to the task, students do not connect the two and therefore the rewards have little to no long-term impact on reading attitudes and behaviors. They also can have a negative impact on students' intrinsic motivation for reading. Some examples of relevant rewards used in summer reading programs (cited in survey responses by public librarians) include books, bookmarks, small toys or trinkets directly related to what the participant is reading (e.g., a small toy dinosaur when the child chooses to read books about dinosaurs), a public library card, a certificate of achievement from the library, a trip to see a play based on a book everyone has read.<sup>33</sup>

## Final Thoughts

Our society is replete with rewards and incentives for just about everything. In sports, we have medals and trophies. In the workplace, we have bonuses and prizes. In schools, we have reading incentive programs that control what children read and only provide prizes to those who can demonstrate they read within their category, rather than be the most creative and passionate readers. Libraries and librarians not only have an opportunity to support young readers' skill-building but also they can become reading advocates and role models to foster students' creativity and lifelong reading habits. We refer to this as becoming "creative readers."<sup>34</sup>

This study looked at the impact of giving extrinsic rewards to potential young participants to get them to participate. Results indicate a mix of opinions from participants, their parents, and surveyed librarians regarding the use of prizes and other incentives to read. However, in this study, because there was no follow-up, more quantitative data collection effort after the summer reading program had ended to determine the positive or negative impact of rewards on participants' reading behaviors and attitudes, we are unable to form any scalable, generalizable conclusions.

It is clear, however, through their summer reading programs, public librarians can stimulate young participants' curiosity and capture their imaginations through exciting and engaging programming that introduces them to new ideas and perspectives through the wonderful world of children's and young adult literature. Perhaps librarians involved in these activities could create a survey just for potential and former participants in summer programs to help them better tailor their program's activities to their needs and preferences. This strategy allows potential future new and repeat participants to have a say in what their program might be like, attracting them to participate. They also might include, on any national-level survey for participants who complete a public library summer reading program, questions about the impact of the incentives and rewards on students' reading attitudes and behaviors.

If rewards are considered necessary to *entice reluctant readers to the program*, librarians might have a raffle and make the prize relevant to reading, such as a set books of the author or genre of their choice or an e-reader (e.g., an Amazon Kindle). Furthermore, to *maintain participation in the program*, rather than spend money, time and effort on offering prizes and rewards that have little or no link to the joy of reading, librarians might think about other types of rewards that are more relevant to the activity, such as a book signing party with a local author or illustrator, mystery events where students must follow clues to discover a newly published book, author or series, brief videos with some of their parents who talk about their favorite book as a child, or a culminating (and relevant) event that sounds so exciting, no one will want to miss it.

We recommend expanded research on the use of rewards in summer reading programs, collecting data that can lead to

more generalizable conclusions that will continue to inform and advise those who work so hard to provide exciting summer reading programs to our nation's youth. Working together, summer reading program participants, their parents, and their librarians can design summer reading programs that focus on helping youth not only read *more* but read *better*, and become passionate, creative readers who begin/continue to experience the joy of reading and cultivate a lifelong reading habit. 📖

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