

“Prizeless” Summer Reading Programs

Do they work?

Pros

- Eliminates competition among readers.
- Studies show that trinkets/prizes do not improve participation.
- Less work/worry on the staff.
- Cuts down on costs to run the SRP.
- Children who love to read don't need prizes or incentives to read.
- Helps to make the SRP about reading (not about prizes).

Cons

- Some children, such as the reluctant reader, need incentives.
- It is difficult to come up with ideas, beside prizes, to motivate them.
- We may need to spend a little more time and maybe more money to entice them, which some libraries don't have much extra of either.

Ideas that libraries use or have used for the SRP

- Tickets, to be used for raffles, given for how much was read (time/hours spent reading or number of books read).
- Small gifts, such as Stewart's gift cards, given to reward reading.
- Donations (from a sponsor) made in honor of a child.
- Have stopped using small trinket prizes (i.e. Oriental Trading) but still offer prizes.
- Raffles of themed gift baskets.
- Visit gifts such as stickers or pencils given each time a child visits the library during the SRP.
- Use bingo cards instead of reading records. Squares have different library-related activities. Switch cards each week.
- Welcome to SRP Package – includes a craft that they can display or share if they want to.
- Each child who participates in the SRP receives a new book.
- Child receives something, like a Stewart's gift card, for every 100 minutes that they read. The library keeps a chart of the participant and gives stars as they read/reach their goals. This may work better in smaller libraries.

Ideas that libraries could consider

- Move away from individual prizes and go to group goals. Make it age appropriate. The more they read, the bigger the goal. Choose group activity such as bowling, a skating party, a pizza party, ice cream party, a DJ party, etc. This idea may need to be phased in.
- Choose an animal or a charity that you want to raise money for. Decorate accordingly once a theme has been chosen. Children can get sponsors (\$.10 per book read) and the money would go to that charity. The WWF has stuffed animals that you could get depending on what endangered animal you choose to support. Participants can vote on where they want the money to go to or each year, the top reader can choose the charity or animal for the following year.
- Give top readers the opportunity to be involved in a programming idea.
- Give the teens/tweens the opportunity to get a new book purchased for the library. The top reader would also get the first crack at the book when it arrives. This could be done at all levels and would enhance collections.
- Participant who reads the most can be an “honorary” person of the day, such as a librarian (or another town official) or they could shadow someone of their choice in the community.

Other thoughts:

- Would like to see the children in the driver’s seat – have them in control of certain aspects of the SRP. Find out what they would like for a successful SRP.
- Children should set their own goals.
- Comparing SRP to school reading - the children get to choose the books that they read.
- Prefer time read rather than amount read. Reward for the effort and the time put into it.
- There is no way to prove how much a child has really read.
- Be as creative as possible.
- Get to know the children and do what works best for them and your library!