

MONTHLY LIBRARY CHALLENGE

OCTOBER 2019

Let's get into some library engagement! This month's Challenge is all about getting your students and teachers actively involved in the library! We do this through events and fun activities in the library. Many of the activities celebrate fall and October, but some work year-round.

The following activities are detailed in the pages following the Challenge. Print this page and keep it in a place where you can easily see it often. Check off tasks as you complete them.

For the October Challenge, you will get one entry in the Rafflecopter drawing for EACH TASK you complete from the following list:

- Make a plan and tentative schedule for October events.
- Meet with your principal about your library plans for October.
- Email your teachers to let them know about the library's October activities.
- Create an AWESOME fall or Halloween-themed book display.
- Start a "You've Been Boo'd!" game for teachers and staff.
- Start a decorated pumpkin patch/gourd display.
- Start a Book Character Day tradition in your school. The day does not have to happen in October, but you do need to schedule it and start advertising it.
- Schedule a small group visit to your local children's hospital on Oct. 30 or Oct. 31.
- Plan a "Snuggle Up and Read Day" for your school. Again, this does not have to happen in October, but it should be scheduled, planned, and advertised.
- Play spooky instrumental music in the library on Halloween.
- Put at least 10 "Toilet Talkers" in areas where students/teachers will see them.
- Start a board and card games club in the library.
- Start a "No Stress" book club with your students and/or your teachers.
- Got something else in mind? You can count that too. It should be something NEW to your library or an activity or event you've IMPROVED in a significant way. And since we're talking about engagement, it should help increase teacher and/or student engagement in your library.

TASK #1:

MAKE A SCHEDULE.

Before you do anything else, sit down and read through my ideas for engagement in the library. Yes, I know this month's packet is long and detailed, but you don't have to read every single page. Find the ideas that appeal to you and start with those. Some are more simple than others, and some may not work for your school or grade levels.

A few tips:

- Print a blank October calendar reserved just for planning October activities. You can add them to your normal library calendar later. We're just drafting a plan right now. ([free monthly calendars on TPT](#))
- Pick the activities that most speak to you. Planning even one activity in the library is better than zero.
- Decide on dates that work for the activities. Be ready to propose multiple dates in case of schedule conflicts.
- Be careful about biting off more than you can chew. I am terrible about this, and I bet many of you are, too. You know your limits; try to honor them without making yourself crazy.
- You are not bound to only the items on this list. If you have an idea for your library that increases student or teacher engagement in the library, you are welcome to count that as a task. It should be either a NEW library activity OR a previous activity you are IMPROVING to increase engagement.

TASK #2:

MEET WITH THE PRINCIPAL

Some of you are lucky and have fantastic, supportive principals. I've had fantastic, supportive principals, too.

Some of you are dealing with principals who "don't get it." These principals may be intimidating bullies, or they may just be incompetent at their jobs. Unfortunately, I've had these principals, too.

No matter your relationship with your current principal, it is critical that you keep the lines of communication open. Open communication is the key to a smooth relationship with your principal because:

- You may need permission for certain activities.
- You'll want the principal's support.
- School-wide activities require scheduling coordination, and you may not be aware of all the possible scheduling conflicts.
- Meeting with your principal shows him or her that you are serious about your work and proud of what you do.
- You are working hard in the library, but your principal may not see that. If you meet with your principal regularly to discuss library happenings, they are more likely to see how hard you are working. This is especially important if your principal frequently asks you to cover classes for absent teachers.
- Some parents contact the principal with every question they have, regardless if it's truly a question for the principal. For this reason, principals need to know about all school-wide activities. If a parent calls the principal with a question about a school-wide library activity, the principal should at least have some background knowledge on it.

TASK #3:

EMAIL YOUR TEACHERS.

If you've ever been a classroom teacher, you know that that your carefully-laid plans for the classroom are sometimes interrupted by school-wide or whole-grade activities. Teachers have no choice but to roll with this, even though it can be incredibly disruptive to the flow of their lessons. It's stressful, too.

Because this happens, it is critical that your teachers know when their class will not be with them. They need to know this well in advance of the event. I recommend you notify your teachers at least 2-3 weeks prior to the event. **You should also add all non-routine events to your school's online calendar and parent notification system.**

Teachers need reminders of the event. **I like to send three emails about events to my teachers. Write the reminders on your calendar so you do not forget to send them.**

- **The first email** is an overview of the events of the coming weeks. Do not include lots of details here, just dates, times, which students are involved, and a brief description of the activity. This email goes out to the whole school.
- **The second email** goes out 3-5 school days prior to a particular event. If there are two or more events in the same week, you should include them on the same email. This reminder should include a bulleted list of pertinent details like who, what, when, where, and how. I usually send this email attached to the first email so everyone can see that they were, in fact, told of the upcoming event and the dates previously. Depending on the events, I may send this to the whole school, or I may just send it to the people whose students are involved. Make sure school admin is CC'd on this email also.
- **The third email** goes out to all involved the day before the scheduled activity. Again, you'll want to send this as a "reply all" attached to your previous email. This third email is just a quick reminder of the event that will happen the following day. Refer teachers to the previous email for details, and don't forget to CC your school admin.
- **Despite all this notification**, you may still have teachers who claim they didn't know about the event. Expect it and try to be forgiving of the teacher who says this. Teachers get so many emails in one day, and there are loads of events to keep track of. When I was a teacher, especially when I was new, I inadvertently missed events, too. It happens, and it's not the end of the world. Know that if you've sent out three emails in a timely manner, you've done your due diligence.

TASK #4:

CREATE A BOOK DISPLAY

Unless you just started working in the library this week, you've most likely created book displays. This is nothing new for librarians because we know the value of patrons seeing the books grouped in an eye-catching and interesting way.

Since we've created book displays before, I wanted to share some tips that might help you "up your game" to create displays that get your patrons' attention.

If you are not already doing these things, try implementing one or more of these ideas with your October display:

- **Use props.** If you are doing a scary books display (recommended for October!), you could add spider webs, an oversized spider, a witch's hat and/or broom, dry ice, a cauldron, a skeleton, a haunted house, ghosts, etc. You can find many of these items at your local dollar store, and Pinterest is full of ideas for creating displays with props on the cheap.
- **Add color.** Save your Scholastic book fair tablecloths! These are colorful and relatively durable and will make your display pop! Check your local dollar store for different tablecloths that you can use over and over. Butcher paper also works.
- **Level your displays.** One of my schools had zero display areas, so I created one with an all-purpose table and a bench. I placed the bench on top of the table, covered both with tablecloths, and voila! A beautiful display area! You can also wrap printer paper boxes in wrapping or butcher paper to make excellent display levels and sign holders that you can reuse for years.
- **Make a sign.** How are these books related to one another? Just putting the books on a table together does not catch people's attention. Without a sign, the books will seem randomly selected for the display.
- **Keep your display full.** Replace the books regularly as they get checked out. If there are books that have been on display for several days, rotate them out with different titles that match the display theme.
- **Make sure your patrons know** they can check out the displayed books. My checkout mantra is, "if you can see it, you can check it out." I say this over and over and over, using these exact words every time. It may also help to write it on small signs near your displays.

TASK #5:

“YOU’VE BEEN BOO’D!”

My school’s Sunshine Committee did this activity, and it’s a great way to help boost teacher morale in October. It’s kind like an October version of Secret Santa, except the idea is to “Boo” every teacher in your school (not just those who choose to participate).

This activity can be done solo, but I highly recommend you recruit a few people for a Boo Team. If you have a Sunshine Committee, these are your go-to people.

Here’s how it works:

- The first teacher (maybe that’s you!) buys or makes a small treat for five different teachers. This could be a batch of cookies (each teacher gets 2 cookies), some Tootsie pops dressed up as ghosts, some “skeleton bones” (pretzels), etc. Try to make these October- or fall-themed if you can. You can buy small bags or containers at (you guessed it!) your local dollar store.
- Sometime during the school day, sneak the treat on the teacher’s desk. Don’t forget to also Boo your paraprofessional staff, school administrators, custodians, cafeteria workers, counselors, and others who are easily left out of these kinds of activities.
- With the treat, include a “You’ve Been Boo’d!” poem (several available for free on TPT and online—Google or search TPT or Pinterest for “You’ve Been Boo’d!”
- Put an “I’ve Been Boo’d!” sign on the person’s door (this usually comes with the “You’ve Been Boo’d” signs you find online). This tells others that the teacher has already received their Boo treat and that the next “Boo-er” should find someone who has not yet been Boo’d. It also creates curiosity and excitement for being “Boo’d.”
- Keep an eye on the Boo-ing! You will know if someone has been Boo’d because they will have the sign on their door. The person who is Boo’d will ideally Boo someone else within a day or two, but we all know this won’t happen with everyone. If the Boo-ing seems to die down mid-month, you (and your Boo team) will need to rev it back up again. Make more treats. Make sure everyone gets their Boo!
- In the last week of October, walk your halls with a notebook and make a list of anyone who has not yet been Boo’d. You (and your Boo team!) need to make sure every teacher and support staff member gets Boo’d. It’s so sad for that person who has been forgotten, and the “forgotten” people tend to be the same ones over and over (i.e., the paraprofessional staff, custodians, cafeteria workers, etc.)

TASK #6:

OH MY GOURD!

Full disclosure: Our math team set this one up, not me. I think it was something to do with symmetry? Whatever it was, the decorated gourds were displayed in the library. I think it's easy enough to organize if this isn't already happening in your school.

For simplicity, I use the word "gourd" to describe pumpkins, squash, and gourds.

Students decorated their gourds using paint, glue, yarn, glitter, and other props. The gourds were on-display in the library as students finished them.

Search "painted pumpkins book characters" on Pinterest for tons of ideas!

Tips:

- If the library is going to organize it, it would be great if the gourds represent books or book characters. Display the book with the gourd.
- Emphasize that the gourds should NOT BE CUT or sliced in any way. It won't be long before they start to smell and draw insects.
- Participation should be OPTIONAL.
- Concerned about participation? Make it a contest!
- In my experience, participation increased from year to year.
- Encourage your teachers to create gourds, too!
- Allow "team gourds," where students decorate gourds as a small group (this may also increase participation).
- Ask parents and community members to donate uncut, undecorated gourds. Pumpkins and large squashes are best, but smaller gourds will work, too.
- Set up a gourd creation station that includes paint, glue, scissors, construction paper, fabric, and other basic art supplies. This will help students who can't afford to buy decorations.
- Make name plates for the gourds! Encourage the creators to think up a catchy title for their gourd art.

TASK #7:

START A BOOK CHARACTER DAY

I think I've run and/or participated in a Book Character Dress-Up Day every year I've been a school librarian! Dressing up as book characters is fun and creative, and students love it!

There are loads of book character costume ideas on Pinterest and online. Some of my favorite costumes have included: one of the Three Blind Mice, Pinkalicious, Jill from "Jack and Jill," Babymouse, the mouse from *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie*, and Roller Girl. All were easy to create and cost me very little money. It's amazing all the costumes you can create from a simple pair of mouse ears!

Some tips for organizing a Book Character Day:

- Meet with your principal to discuss the event and set a date. Some principals may not want the day set on Halloween, and others will prefer it were on Halloween since students sometimes show up for school in Halloween costumes anyway. The Book Character Day can happen at anytime—your job for this challenge is to plan it.
- Talk to students in the weeks leading up to the Day. Show them examples of great costumes (check Pinterest!) and talk to them about ways they can create costumes using items they already have at home.
- Send a parent letter describing the event. As a mom, I know the value of sending these letters as early as possible. We need time to get the costumes together. Please give us as much time as you can.
- Take lots of photos! If you can, post them to a secured parent portal or play scrolling PowerPoints of photos throughout the day. These also make great yearbook photos.
- I have personally never offered prizes or done a contest, but I know many schools do. This may help increase participation at middle and high schools.
- Encourage your teachers and staff to dress up, too!
- I've also organized Book Character Parades. This was a lot to set up and organize, and I only recommend it if you have a team of people working on it with you. It doesn't sound like much to organize, but in my experience, it quickly snowballs into a major event for parents and a ton of stress for you. Take care of yourself!

TASK #8:

VISIT THE CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL.

I actually did this when I was in high school, and it was fun and memorable. We went on Halloween night, dressed in non-scary costumes (book characters work great!), and visited and played games with the children who were unable to go Trick-or-Treating.

Tips to make the hospital visit go smoothly:

- You MUST talk with the appropriate hospital admins and get permission to do this. Do not just show up expecting to visit sick children.
- Take a small group. I recommend fewer than 10 students. This would be perfect for a book club or group of student library aides.
- For high school students, it may work best to go at night so they don't miss class. Ask them meet you at the hospital lobby at a designated time. They will find a way to get there.
- For middle school or elementary students, visit the hospital during the day on Halloween so you can take a school bus. Again, a small group of students is key—you don't want to overwhelm the patients or be disruptive in the hospital hallways.
- Make sure students know to wear non-scary costumes and that they should not give out any candy or other food to the children. Playing cards, board games, and picture books to read together are great activities for this visit.
- Do not overstay your welcome. Give the hospital a specific start and stop time and stick to it. The hospital can help you decide how long you can stay.

TASK #9:

SNUGGLE UP AND READ

This is an easy activity to plan! I've done it in a PreS-Grade 12 school. Even the high school students loved wearing their pajamas, drinking hot chocolate, and having some extra time to read. Some high school students even brought their stuffed animals!

For Snuggle Up and Read, I worked with our principals to set up a specific time for the whole school (or whole grades if that works better) to curl up and read. We wore pajamas and brought our stuffed animals from home. I also arranged for the cafeteria to serve hot chocolate and cookies to every single student and teacher.

Tips for Snuggle Up and Read:

- Give teachers and parents at least two weeks' notice on your plans. Teachers need to plan for the change in the schedule. Parents need to make sure student pajamas are clean and don't have too many holes.
- Don't forget the "Read" part! Your students, teachers, and staff should ALL read for an extended period of time today. I recommend at least one 30-minute session (older students) or two 15-minute sessions (younger students).
- Encourage teachers to have places in the classroom where students can "snuggle up" to read. Reading at your desk is not snuggling up. If the classrooms don't have soft furniture or cushions (most likely in secondary schools), they can ask students to bring in small pillows to sit or lie down on while they read.
- Marshmallows! Hot chocolate needs marshmallows, and you'll hear about it if you forget them (I learned this the hard way).
- Try to have some extra stuffed animals on hand for students who forget theirs or don't have one.

TASK #10:

SPOOKY MUSIC!

I frequently play soft instrumental music in the library. Students tell me it's relaxing and helps them study.

On Halloween, I play spooky instrumentals. Check your local classical music station for their Halloween playlist—many will play spooky instrumentals all day long.

Where can you find spooky instrumentals?

- I really love [WRR 101.1 Classical FM from Dallas, TX](#). They have a “listen online” feature that even works all the way here in China. I can't guarantee they'll do it this year, but in past years, they have played a Halloween-themed list of instrumentals starting at noon on Oct. 31.
- Check Amazon Prime, iTunes, Spotify, and/or Pandora for:
 - Instrumental music from *The Nightmare Before Christmas* ([Vitamin String Quartet on Amazon](#) has a great rendition of The Nightmare Before Christmas instrumentals)
 - Any of the Harry Potter movie soundtracks ([included with Amazon Prime memberships](#))
- Tons of YouTube stations have spooky instrumentals. I'm not going to link them here because I'm not sure which ones are on YouTube legally. But there are lots of spooky instrumental playlists on YouTube, too!

TASK #11:

TOILET TALKERS

What on earth is a Toilet Talker? Well, it's a ½ page booktalk you place on the backs of restroom stall doors. Nope, not joking!

I've created some Toilet Talkers and templates for you as this month's Challenge freebie. The Talkers will be free throughout the month of October 2019. You are welcome to use mine, or you can pick ten books you want to "toilet talk" and write a little blurb about them on the template. Add the call number and book cover image.

Toilet Talker tips:

- Get principal approval first. You may also want to talk to your head custodian to let them know what you are doing.
- Email your teachers. Tell them they will start seeing the Talkers in the restrooms and that all the books are available in the school library.
- Laminating may help keep the Talkers clean and fresh. Students are also less likely to write on them if they are laminated.
- Don't like the idea of "Toilet" Talkers? Put them by the sinks or water fountains instead.
- Consider the age of students using that particular bathroom when you are creating them. For example, I would not put a YA Toilet Talker in a bathroom designated for sixth grade.
- You might also consider the location of the bathrooms. For a bathroom in the science hall, place Talkers that deal with science-themed books.
- Change out your Talkers every 2-3 weeks.
- Keep a list of your Talkers in the library. Students and teachers will ask you for these books, and it helps to know what books they are asking for.
- Keep in mind that the Toilet Talkers are in a bathroom and will collect bathroom germs. Wear disposable gloves when you remove the Talkers, and do not keep and reuse them.
- Ask your custodians and/or students to let you know if any Talkers need to be replaced. When I had 8th grade library aides, I asked them to check them for me during their library period.

TASK #12:

BOARD GAMES/CARD CLUB

This is an easy activity to organize and run year-round. Students can bring in their own games, or you can provide them. I've learned about so many new games from these clubs!

Tips:

- What is the best time and/or day of the week for your library to do a games club? Mine was available daily before school and during lunches. Students just came to the circulation desk to request the game they wanted, or they brought their own games to share.
- Do you want to allow digital games? Decide beforehand so you are ready when you get this question. I didn't allow this because I wanted all students included and not just watching over the shoulders of those who had devices.
- Consider the noise level. Connect Four is loud when the grid is emptied. Simon makes musical noise. Five-Second Rule comes with a noisy timer. These aren't inherently bad, but know what you're getting into.
- Don't have any games? Check garage sales, ask for donations, or look on Ebay.
- If you are providing games, try to choose games that require few pieces. Students are not always great about cleaning up, and pieces are easily lost. Some games that are easy to keep up with include:
 - Yahtzee
 - Guess Who
 - Pass the Pigs
 - Sorry
 - Chutes and Ladders
 - Five-Second Rule
 - Headbandz
 - Trouble
 - Checkers (magnetic or travel is even better; oversized is also fun)
 - Chess (esp. magnetic or travel)
 - Connect Four
 - Boggle
 - Card games: Uno, Skip-Bo, Old Maid, Go fish, Memory, regular playing cards
 - Travel edition games

TASK #13:

“NO STRESS” BOOK CLUB

I’ve done this club many times with different age groups and with teachers/staff. It’s ridiculously easy to organize—all you need to do is set a time and date and start talking about it. For more details, [check out my blog post about the No-Stress Book Club](#).

A few tips:

- This club works with many grade levels. I’ve done it with middle school, high school, and teacher groups. I think it would also work well with elementary students.
- The less you organize this, the better. “No Stress” includes you, too. Pick a date, announce it, and let the students take control.
- I have done this club before school, after school, and during lunches (students brought their lunches to the library).
- Give a few guidelines at the start of every book club meeting. I didn’t want any one person talking more than 2-3 minutes. No spoilers. No long, detailed summaries. Just tell us a little about what you’re reading and how it’s going. And an important one: be honest. It’s okay if you aren’t loving your book right away or if you are thinking about abandoning it.
- What I love about this club:
 - Students/teachers choose their own books and read at their own pace.
 - Participants can choose to talk during the club, or they can choose to just listen.
 - If the group is very large, you can just split it into smaller groups around the library.
 - No sign-up is required. Your club can handle a large number of students at any given meeting.
 - Since we’re all reading different books at our own pace, students can join at any time.
 - Students don’t have to be currently reading something to attend. They can still enjoy listening to the other students’ booktalks.
 - This club requires minimal planning. I didn’t even really advertise it—it was all word of mouth. Pick a small group of readers in each grade to start with. It will grow on its own.
 - If your group does grow to unmanageable numbers, break it up by grade levels, birthday months, book genres, etc.