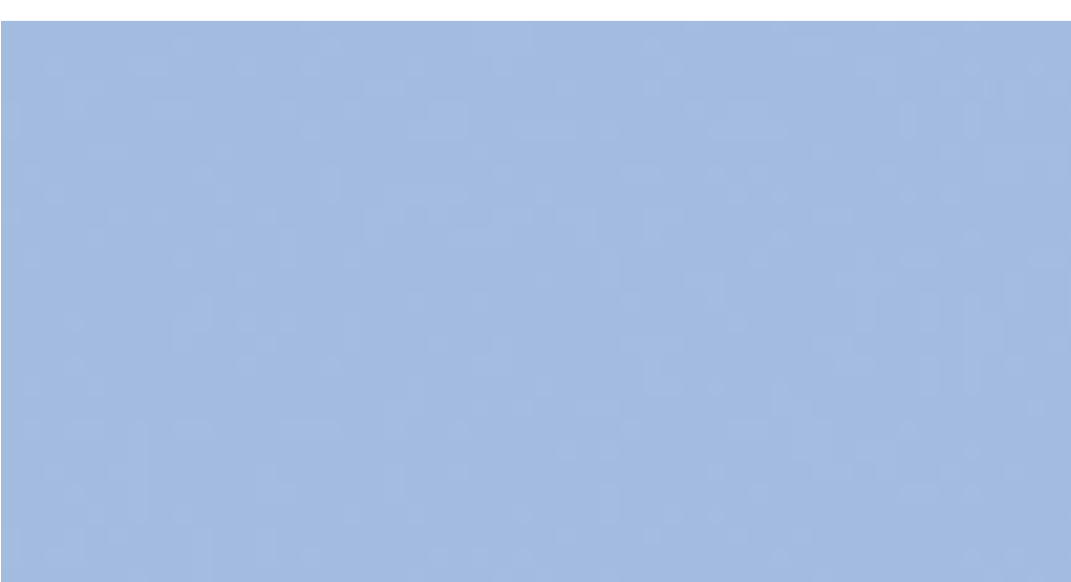




The BOOST Quick Guide

A Guidebook
to Great After-School
Library Projects



Introduction

Every day, hundreds of children and young people leave school and head off to the more than 60 community libraries in the Queens Library system. The BOOST (Best Out-of-School Time) after-school program was launched in 2005 to provide these young library patrons with homework help and enriching social and learning activities. BOOST serves, without charge, all children ages 6-to-14 who come to any community library in Queens between the hours of 3 and 6 PM on weekdays.

The Queens Library, with generous support from The Wallace Foundation, asked The After-School Corporation (TASC), to provide library staff members with training and technical assistance to help them build the BOOST program. In the program's first two years, library staff members have created opportunities for children to learn new skills and information, to have positive social experiences and to connect with caring adults. At the same time, BOOST activities have made after-school time in libraries more structured and manageable.

In collaboration with the Queens Library Community Library staff and BOOST Activity Assistants, TASC created *The BOOST Quick Guide* to share the promising after-school activities that community libraries undertook as demonstration projects. Library staff members are encouraged to adapt these initiatives to suit the interests and needs of their communities. The guide includes a description of each demonstration project, essential elements for its implementation, and ideas for adaptation. Use and enjoy!

The ESSENTIALS

- A topic of interest to the children (slavery or something else)
- Books from your library's collection. Choose a reference book and a book that will identify particular individuals. The “Slavery in New York” teaching guide is great because it includes activities and reference information
- An adult or teen that can help children work on their biographies

The RESULTS

- Kids had positive experiences with library books
- Kids at the Rochdale Village Library expanded their knowledge of slavery, and connected their own identities as people of color to the long history of inequity in the United States
- Kids chose the topic, were interested and invested in the project, and stayed focused on a single topic for several months
- Performing in front of each other and their parents increased the children's self-esteem

Options for YOUR LIBRARY

- Brainstorm with children to choose a historical topic of interest to them
- Create a project that relates directly to your library's special collection
- Find a community volunteer or hire an instructor to lead complementary activities such as teaching children to sew their own costumes

Project profile:

Slavery in New York

Rochdale Village

The Rochdale Village Library implemented a literacy activity taken from the New York City Historical Society's “Slavery in New York” teaching guide.

The children wrote one page autobiographies, picturing themselves as the historical figures they read about. The children became so engaged in the project, that the Activity Assistant expanded the project to include a dramatization of the autobiographies. The children created their own costumes and props, and performed for an audience of parents, other children, and community members.

Project profile:

Learning Chess

Corona

Before the project, BOOST staff at the Corona Library had many children waiting for homework assistance without any organized activity, because they could not help all of the kids at the same time. Staff identified chess as a quiet, fun, educational game that children can play while waiting for homework help. The Corona Library hired a chess teacher to provide lessons for two groups of children once per week. Chess became a regular part of the library culture and kids played often.

The ESSENTIALS

- Chess boards and pieces (roll up boards are available for about \$15 per set)
- A space for chess lessons
- A teacher from NYChessKids (<http://www.nychesskids.com/>) was hired, although the activity can work with any dedicated activity assistant or volunteer to teach the children
- Match children with partners of a similar skill level
- A permission slip, approved by the Central Library, indicating parental support for regular attendance for 8-10 weeks

The RESULTS

- Kids were engaged with the chess club, had fun, learned new problem-solving skills that they were proud of, and the library became a place of focus and quiet
- Kids planned to create an ongoing chess club to keep playing with each other
- Chess promoted social interaction, and provided leadership positions for kids, as more experienced players can serve as teachers to new players
- In the second year, the Rochdale Village Library followed Corona's lead and instituted regular chess lessons

Options for YOUR LIBRARY

- Consider involving community volunteers who know how to play
- Form a similar club with other games that promote strategic and critical thinking skills such as cards, Scrabble, or Backgammon

The ESSENTIALS

- The Queens Zoo Earth Action Club supplies all necessary materials free of charge. (Contact the OST Program Planner to help you plan your program.)
- A space separate from the rest of the library activities

The RESULTS

- The program appealed to kids of all ages. Younger children were excited about the names and diets of animals, while older children gained a better understanding of the creatures and served as activity helpers
- Kids living in an urban environment were better able to relate their own lives as humans to the well-being of the planet and animals
- In its second year, librarians strengthened the club by discussing media coverage of contemporary environmental issues and global changes

Options for YOUR LIBRARY

- Plan and carry out this project without the zoo educator, using library books
- Identify other community organizations that deliver activities to children after-school

Project profile:

Earth Action Club

Broadway

The Children's Librarian at the Broadway Library invited an educator from the Queens Zoo to teach the children about animals and their environments. The educator used hands-on activities to engage children of varying ages throughout the seven week program. Topics included endangered species, habitats, impacts of the animal trade, and bird migration. After the program, the library hosted a gallery opening to display children's work for parents and community members. In its second year, the Broadway Library began the Earth Action Reading Circle, with a librarian reading an environment-related book aloud each week at the same time.

Project profile:

Pen Pal Club

*Kew Gardens &
Queensboro Hill*

Although letter writing is becoming a lost art with the widespread use of new communication technologies, two librarians recognized that it can be a fun informal way to teach literacy skills to children. They created a pen pal club to connect the children at their respective libraries and encouraged them to write to each other.

The ESSENTIALS

- Writing and art supplies
- Match-up pen pals by age, common interest or writing ability, and match infrequent participants so kids don't have to wait too long for a response from their pen pal
- Kids can send letters, jokes or book reviews to each other

The RESULTS

- Kids had an enjoyable non-stressful reason to write, learned the skill of letter writing, and had positive social interactions
- Kids wanted to return to the library to retrieve letters from their pen pals
- For younger and less developed writers, just pretending to write was an important activity that created positive associations with literacy. These kids dictated short messages and created art for their pen pals

Options for YOUR LIBRARY

- Have kids write letters to family members, historical figures, or themselves in the future
- Give lessons on the basic format and components of a letter including the envelope, stamp, address, and return address
- Even though kids will not need stamps to send letters from one library to the other, it can be fun to encourage the children to design and attach their own "library stamps"

The ESSENTIALS

- A staff member with expertise in dance or movement
- A room where kids can dance
- A boom box and selection of music appropriate for the type of dance/movement
- Books or videos about dance
- Careful planning, as kids build on what they learned the week before. Lessons work best when a group of kids are committed to attending each week
- This activity requires release forms signed by parents and approval from the Health and Safety Department

The RESULTS

- Kids took an interest in ballet, and behaved well
- Kids were able to be physically active within the BOOST setting
- Children established a strong relationship with library staff, which made the homework help sessions more productive

Options for YOUR LIBRARY

- Older kids who have taken a series of lessons can be "assistants"
- Kids can put on an end-of-year show, to show off their new skills, and non-dancers can be show organizers, ushers, or announcers
- Based on your own skills and the kids' interests try teaching a different physical activity such as yoga, modern dance, Pilates, tango, salsa, etc.

Project profile:

Weekly Dance Class

Peninsula

The Peninsula Library staff wanted to give kids a chance to get some exercise and learn about a subject they were unlikely to explore in school. The Peninsula Library happened to have a staff-person with experience teaching ballet. She volunteered to organize a once-a-week introductory ballet class for kids between the ages of 10 and 14, including light exercises, books, music, video and discussions.

Project profile:

Community Newsletter

North Hills

The North Hills Library had a group of participants who consistently attended the BOOST program. The librarians created a newsletter to engage kids in literacy activities and teach them about the components of a newspaper. Children identified subjects to write about and learned about their community in the process.

The ESSENTIALS

- A computer, a printer, and printer paper
- Engage enough kids to be able to fulfill the newsletter responsibilities, and allow for inconsistent attendance
- Supervise kids and help them focus on writing articles

The RESULTS

- Kids developed literacy skills, and enjoyed doing research and writing their articles
- Kids had a sense of responsibility for the project, worked collaboratively, and developed positive social skills
- Kids showcased their work through their contributions to the newsletter

Options for YOUR LIBRARY

- Encourage kids to perform library-based research for their articles, and think about what articles will be most relevant and interesting to members of their community
- Invite community members with a background in journalism to help
- Use resources at:
<http://www.tascorp.org>

The ESSENTIALS

- Range of supplies such trivia quizzes found on the Internet, different types of books, art supplies, an engaging play for kids to perform and board games
- Time to plan a different activity for each day of the week

The RESULTS

- Kids had fun and formed friendships around their shared interests, due to the varied topics offered and regularly scheduled time together
- Kids had an exciting reason to return to the library on a regular basis, and created strong relationships with library staff

Options for YOUR LIBRARY

- Offer other clubs based on kids' interests at your library, such as Math, Environment, Science, or Community Service Clubs

Project profile:

Clubhouse

Queensboro Hill

At the Queensboro Hill Library, librarians set up a different club for each day of the week. In the Fact Finders and Cybersquad club kids took quizzes and learned to perform simple research to answer trivia; the Book Club introduced a new genre of literature each week and engaged kids with interactive and guided reading projects; the Art Club gave kids new art and media projects; in the Show Club, kids prepared for and performed a play; and during the Game Players Club, kids had an opportunity to play fun educational board games in a structured setting. Each club attracted different children, although some kids had so much fun at one club that they joined others as well.

Project profile:

Media Blog

Forest Hills

The Forest Hills Library Blog, or web-log, is written by children and facilitated by the Children's Librarian. The Forest Hills Blog focuses on the way in which media affects kids' beliefs and actions. Children articulate their experiences with and opinions about the media, discussing questions such as, "what is the media?" and "what media are we each exposed to every day?" Kids record their media experiences in their journals, which serve as the basis for the blog entries. (At the time of publication the Blog Project was still developing.)

The ESSENTIALS

- Before introducing children to the blog, it is crucial to discuss Internet safety
- Research and be mindful of Queens Library blog policies
- Computer access and space suitable for discussions and brainstorming
- Set up and test the Blog server before meeting with the kids to minimize technology issues
- For an example blog, see: <http://www.auntie-en.blogspot.com/>

The RESULTS

- Kids will gain an understanding of and experience with the Internet and blogging
- Kids will have an opportunity to practice literacy skills using new technology
- Kids can create friendships through shared participation in the blog

Options for YOUR LIBRARY

- Other blog topics could include events taking place in the community, experiences at school, or the environment
- Hire a blog consultant, who can help make the blog more accessible to kids

The ESSENTIALS

- The KidzMath Box set has all necessary materials. (Ask the Queens Library Central Office if interested.)
- Familiarize yourself with the story books and work through the activities before using them with children

The RESULTS

- Kids engaged in fun math activities and improved their math skills
- Staff adapted activities for kids of varied skill levels
- Staff became more aware of BOOST participants' math skills, and were able to help kids who were struggling with math

Options for YOUR LIBRARY

- Consult with math teachers or trainers from nearby schools to better address math issues
- Invite family members to the library for an afternoon or evening of fun math games

Project profile:

KidzMath

Jackson Heights

BOOST staff at the Jackson Heights Library used KidzMath to engage children in fun math activities. KidzMath is a hands-on curriculum designed for after-school settings, which provides activity guides that lead practitioners step-by-step through engaging lessons. The KidzMath framework uses a core set of picture books, math manipulatives, and construction materials.

Project profile:

Community Photography

St. Albans

With sponsorship from the Friends of St. Albans group, the St. Albans Library conducted a photography project. The project expanded on a photography component of the library's Summer Reading program, to document the history of St. Albans through photographs and interviews with community members.

The **ESSENTIALS**

- Cameras and film to lend to children. (Contact the Central Library if interested in using photography equipment.)
- To ensure safe return of equipment, the library affixed bar codes to each piece and lent them out as books on children's library cards
- Community volunteers for children to interview

The **RESULTS**

- Kids expressed themselves through the art of photography
- Kids learned about their community, for example, one participant interviewed her pastor for the project
- The kids exhibited their work in the library

Options for **YOUR LIBRARY**

- Stage an exhibit opening, where parents and community members can admire the children's work

Acknowledgements

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