

You are working hard to build a culture of literacy among your members, and families are anxious to continue supporting their readers at home. Why? Well, one common barrier to creating a literacy-rich environment is access to high-interest reading material, and an easy to organize activity will help your members overcome that hurdle while promoting your community-building work: a book swap.

What: A book swap is a free, open-community event where members exchange gently used books for others contributed by their peers as a way of promoting literary interest and access to new-to-you, high-interest books.

Why: A book swap promotes a culture of literacy among your membership and facilitates a sense of community. A free event for participants, at a low cost to you, this is an excellent means of bringing together families for an enjoyable, non-academic event.

Who: Invite the whole community! While a casual survey of RSVPs might help you plan for supplies, an open invitation minimizes barriers among members more hesitant to engage. Be sure your invitation goes out well in advance and includes all of the languages and formats best suited to reach your audience. Encourage teachers to attend as well.

How: Books can be donated in advance, if storage capacity allows, or collected on-site the day of the event. Decide upon your event design and publicize the guidelines in advance so members know what to expect when they arrive. We recommend you try a one-in-one-out approach with a PTA-supported equity element that ensures every child leaves with at least one book or more as your budget allows.

- In an even exchange, for every book that a family contributes to the swap, give families a chit or ticket to exchange for a new-to-them book on the day of the event.
- Encourage all members of your community to participate, regardless of their ability to contribute books to the swap. (See our Building Your Library guide for low-cost book purchasing resources!)
- To ensure that no reader goes home empty-handed, offer a chit or ticket to every child to select any book.
- Designate a donation recipient to take any books left over at the end of the day, with perhaps a stop in your teacher's lounge, or set up a few milk crates by the front office to create a book depot that offers families a book to read while waiting, or one to take home.
- Promote your event across multiple platforms and in appropriate languages, explaining its intention as a community-building effort, emphasizing free admission, your all-are-welcome approach, and that no one will leave without a book.

Where: This event would work well in the cafeteria or gym with folding tables, or on a sports court or field.

- If you've collected books in advance, volunteers might begin wiping down tables and placing books on tabletops after school on Friday to be ready for a Saturday event.
- Set all the book donations with covers facing up for easy viewing.
- Create clear signage indicating the table's contents. You may choose to group your books by genre or reading level. (The advantage of mixing the titles is that when a child changes their mind about a book they've selected, they can set it down right in place of the replacement book without worrying about location.)

If gathering a large in-person group isn't feasible, this event is still possible. Follow these five steps:

- Consider asking donors to drop off books a week in advance so they can sit untouched for several days.
- Invite volunteers to work, socially distanced and gloved, to place each book into a large Ziploc bag.
- Place bagged books cover side up on your cleaned tables and offer families timed spots to visit one or two small groups at a time to browse and select their books.
- Place disinfectant wipes and hand sanitizer at the exit to allow families to clean the bags and their hands before enjoying their new reads.
- If your budget allows, consider setting a snack table to offer members a cookie or cup of lemonade, and perhaps lay out a few chairs and picnic blankets to invite families to linger over their new books.

When: Consider the ideal timing for your community. A weekday afternoon capitalizes on children already being present at school for the swap. A weekend might offer families whose parents work outside the home a better chance at participating.

- Be sensitive to religious observations with your timing—some Jewish families, for example, may observe the Sabbath and won't participate in an event between Friday and Saturday evenings.
- Plan adequate time for your volunteers to get the books laid out, more time than you'd expect for families to browse, and ample time at the end for volunteers to pack up any remaining books.
- Consider setting up a rest station for volunteers—perhaps with a cooler of drinks, a few chairs, hand sanitizer, and coffee and doughnuts—will be well received.

- Let your community know if this will be a one-time event or the start of a new school tradition, so families might set aside books for exchange anticipating next year's event.

Tips on Book Collection

Collecting books in advance. Consider setting up a table of volunteers to receive books at carpool drop-off for a few mornings in the week before your event, or outside the front office if indoors works better for your school layout. Collecting books in doubled-up brown paper grocery bags or file/copier boxes works better than using larger (moving) boxes as books become heavy to move when they pile up. Ask the front office or a local printing business to save you a few empty copier paper boxes for this purpose! Separating books roughly by reading interest as they are collected gives you the option of offering sorted books during your event. If you go with this approach, set out three or four well-labeled boxes to group book donations, perhaps as picture books, early chapter, chapter books and assorted.

If sorting books seems daunting, or more of a constraint than you want to maintain *during* the event, then just collect the books and offer the mixed bunch at your event—your readers won't mind and may, in fact, enjoy hunting through the selection for a prized find!

Collecting books the day of your event. Understand that collecting books the day of the event involves one less step on the part of participants (as opposed to dropping off books in advance) and volunteers, but likely more chaotic on the day of your event as volunteers receive books and distribute them amongst tables. In this case, families arrive with books in hand and volunteers add those books to open spots on the viewing tables. This approach also means that late arrivals refresh the book selection but may have a more limited pool of remaining books from which to choose.

Use an honor system to exchange books. Invite your members to enter and browse freely, perhaps even adding their books to an open table. If you'll be using a chit/ticket system, exchange the books (whether in advance or on site) for chits and have volunteers available to "check out," offering bags while collecting the chits. Grocery stores will often donate stacks of brown paper bags for community events, or you can encourage members to bring their own totes for an environmentally sustainable approach.