



Nuts & Bolts

INSTRUCTIONS FOR CONTESTS AND ACTIVITIES IN THE SCHOOL LIBRARY

These detailed instructions will help librarians and teachers to replicate the activities presented in Moore's article, From Library Jeopardy to Microfiction Mprovs: Contests and Activities for the School Library (VOYA August 2006), available in print and online at <http://www.voya.com>.

LIBRARY JEOPARDY

1. Write questions for each category and grade level. If you would like copies of my questions, please e-mail me.
2. Print out your questions and answers in a large font, adjusting margins so that they may be cut and pasted onto three-by-five-inch index cards. Place answers on the backs of the cards. For mystery questions, the front should say "Mystery" and the back should contain both question and answer. Indicate grade levels with a letter in the top right corner: A questions for sixth grade, B questions for seventh grade, etc. In the top left corner of each card, label its category. When you store cards for the year, keep them in order so you're set to go the next year.
3. Print out your point-value numbers in large fonts, and paste them onto additional index cards. Print out one set for each grade.
4. Laminate your index cards.
5. Prepare your "boards." Mine are made of butcher paper, one for each grade, so I can always be ready. The boards should say "Library Jeopardy" at the top, with category names below and slots for all the cards. I mount mine on a portable easel.
6. When playing, the teacher or a reliable student keeps score. Divide students into rotating teams so that everyone gets the chance to play. Allow thirty seconds for "sit-down" questions and sixty seconds for "run-around" questions. For computer questions, start timing when the appropriate screen appears. Adjust the timing as you see fit.

WORD READING CONTEST

1. Create an entry form with space for the student's name, book titles, word count per book, word count total, team points per book, and team points total. I also add a "thermometer" marked up to 500,000 words, that can be shaded in as the student reads more and more. I print out my blank forms in blue and gold. 50,000 words = one blue/gold point.
2. Determine your awards. In my contest, the first 100,000 words earn a lollipop, the first 500,000 words earn a free-dress day (our students wear uniforms), and every million words earns a \$5.00 **Amazon.com** gift certificate.
3. Determine your schedule. I run my contest until one team reaches ten million words, which takes about a month.
4. Announce the contest in assembly or school announcements, giving the team totals weekly to keep up interest.
5. Find a space in the library to post the entry forms, alongside full-sized "thermometers" (mine look more like test tubes) marked up to ten million words. Your thermometer should be shaded in every week with the total words of all the team members who have submitted books to the contest, providing students with a visual of their team's progress.
6. Students must bring in their books for your word count estimate. Count the average number of words in a line, multiply it by the number of lines on a page, and multiply that total by the number of pages in the book. Subtract as you see fit for illustrations.

BATTLE OF THE BOOKS

1. Place the Battle on the school calendar at the start of the year. I usually pick the last Friday in January, with a snow date the following Friday. The Battle lasts for two class periods—I choose the last two periods of the day.
2. Get a copy of the official Battle of the Books rules from <http://www.battleofthebooks.org/rules.html> and read it through.
3. Compile an annotated list of ten in-print books of various genres and reading levels. I change most of my titles every year. Solicit teachers to help you read the books and write questions.
4. Buy extra copies of each book. Have at least three copies of each book on hand for the students and the question writers.
5. About three months before the Battle, start posting flyers around the school to announce the impending contest.
6. About two months before the Battle, formally introduce the contest to the students. I do a “Mock Battle” during assembly, so that they can see how it works. I use questions from books that they are likely to have read, such as **Harry Potter** or **Green Eggs and Ham**. I find two eighth graders to act as team captains for the Mock Battle, and to select the Mock Battle teams from volunteers in the audience.
7. Tell students repeatedly when the Battle will be. Make announcements in the daily bulletin, and through flyers and posters.
8. Students may sign up until the week after the Mock Battle assembly. When they register, they pick up an annotated booklist and mark their first six choices. Not everyone will get books they choose, alas—assigning teams is the hardest part of the whole deal.
9. Each team needs three to five players who read two to four books each, depending on their grade or reading level. In any case, assign students to teams and books to students (it’s a headache), and post the list about a week after they have signed up. *Expect* many complaints about books and also expect dropouts. You might have to redo the whole team list more than once.
10. Request teachers or volunteers to help you at the Battle. I’m always the moderator, and I ask all the questions. One teacher keeps time, one keeps score, and one keeps the peace (I call him or her my bailiff). E-mail or phone your parent volunteers, and then send a couple reminders during the month preceding the Battle to those who volunteered. Also send them a sheet detailing their duties and the rules of the Battle.
11. Two weeks before the Battle, sort the questions and make sure that you have questions for each book. You’ll need ten to twenty questions a book, depending on how many rounds you will be playing. Each round includes twenty questions (or twenty-four, if you go by the official rules). I put the piles of questions for each book in a row, and pull two from each pile for each round. I then shake them up before putting the questions in an envelope marked with the number of the round. Keep a pile of extra questions from all the books on hand—you’ll need some of them during the Battle.
12. Schedule the rounds. Each round takes about ten minutes. Add another ten minutes to explain the rules. I write the rules and the schedule on a big sheet of butcher paper and post it on the wall during the Battle, along with the scoreboard. Which teams play which rounds depends on how many teams you have. Each team should compete at least twice, but three times is better. Using the combined scores for all rounds a team has played, take the two top scoring teams for the final round. With five teams, we played seven rounds in an hour and 45 minutes (two periods). Make sure to have a break when classes are changing, so your teacher helpers can come and go. On the overall schedule, two teams are always competing, and one or two (depending on how many teams you have) are on break in the audience.
13. One of the rounds is a break, when we all have refreshments. I hold the Battle in the library, with refreshments in a separate room, so a volunteer (possibly your “bailiff”) can set up and clean up the refreshments without disturbing the Battle or distracting the students (or getting soda on my carpet!). Be sure to have plenty of food and drinks on hand.
14. On the day of the Battle, make sure the judges have what they need (stopwatch, score sheets, calculators, pens, etc.). Make sure that you as moderator have all you need, including the questions for the rounds, the spare questions, and the team lists. Make sure the room is set up properly, with space for you, the teams, the judges, and the audience. Mount the scoreboard and the poster listing the schedule and rules. Have the food ready.
15. Always have a team list/booklist in front of you during the battle, because I guarantee that students won’t show up, and you can’t ask that team a question from a book no one has read. That’s why you need the spare questions.
16. For prizes, give each member of the winning team a paperback book of his or her choice.

LITERARY MAGAZINES

1. Solicit your student staff at the beginning of the year, and remind all teachers and students throughout the year to submit students’ stories, poems, essays, pictures, etc. Offer small rewards for submissions if students feel reluctant to submit of their own volition.
2. Start a database of the titles and authors of submissions, so you can cut the names off the actual submissions before letting staff read them. Add blank spaces to the database to record student votes and comments.
3. If you can engineer a set meeting time for your staff to read submissions, do so. Our schedule does not permit us to have regular meetings, so I attach a small voting form to submissions, then distribute submissions to staff members through their homeroom teachers. I keep track of who has what and when they received it, so I can remind them if they forget to read, vote, and return a submission.
4. Alternately you can establish a literary magazine box where you store all your submissions. Make sure that staff members know where the box is, and can get easy access to it. Print out your title database without the authors’ names, and leave it with the submissions so that staff can vote after reading.
5. Determine how to decide what to accept and what to reject. We rate each piece with a score of 0 for “no way,” 1 for “maybe,” and 2 for “definite yes.”
6. At the end of the year, add up all the numbers, and then compare that number to the total possible score (which will depend on how many staffers actually voted on it), and give the piece a percentage score. Drop the pieces that received low scores and publish the rest.
7. Format the magazine and add clip art or student artwork, being cognizant of copyright issues.
8. Determine how many copies of the magazine to print. I ask teachers for a count from their homerooms of how many students are interested. I also e-mail teachers to ask which ones would like a copy. Staffers automatically get a copy, and I allocate two copies for every contributor. Copies also go to school administrators and offices and to other campus libraries, if you have them. Don’t forget to order a couple copies to archive.
9. Print and distribute the magazine.

LOCAL PLACE NAMES CONTESTS

Geography Class Contest

1. Consult with the geography teacher to schedule the time to run the contest.
2. Compile a list of ten to twenty local place names, along with their true origins. I use a book that lists origins of local place names. If you can't find such a book, check with your local historical society.
3. Create homework sheets listing two of the place names (you will have several different sheets, so each place name will be covered), asking students to create fake origins for those place names. Include an example. Copy enough sheets to cover all geography classes.
4. Decide what the winners will earn—possibly extra credit for geography class. If your school has a system with school teams (such as our Blue/Gold), they should earn points toward their team's total.
5. Collect the homework and compile a master list (or spreadsheet), including the place name and four "origins," in no particular order. Use three false origins and the true origin. Keep track of which student wrote which fake origin. (Here's where using a spreadsheet is helpful.)
6. During the scheduled class time, play Fictionary with the fake place names. I have not yet done this part of the contest (it's scheduled for this year), so you'll need to work out the best way to deal with the complex scoring. You might break the class into small groups or just have them keep track of their own scores.
7. Determine the winners and point earners.

Stand-Alone Contest

1. Compile a list of eleven local place names, along with their true origins. I use a book that lists origins of local place names. If you can't find such a book, check with your local historical society.
2. Create guessing sheets and writing sheets. The guessing sheets need spaces for student names (and whether they're Blue or Gold, or the equivalent at your school), the place name for which they're guessing, and numbers from one to four. To guess, they fill out the sheet and circle the number of the origin that they believe to be real. The writing sheets also need spaces for the student name/place name, and then enough blank space for students to write their fake origin.
3. Decide what the winners will earn. If your school has a system with school teams (such as our Blue/Gold), they should earn points toward their team's total. Lollipops for writing fake origins are always welcome!
4. Write fake origins (three each) for three of the place names, which you will need for announcing the contest and for the first day of the contest.
5. Announce the contest by having the student body guess the origin of one of the place names for which you've written fake origins. Describe the contest.
6. Create a table listing the place names, providing several extra columns for each. Four of these columns list the authors of the fake origins in the order you decide to post them, and identify the real origin. Add extra columns by each name blank to record Blue/Gold points for guesses. Create another table to record points for writing fake origins.
7. For the first day of the contest, post the other two place names for which you wrote fake origins, and two new place names with no origins. Students use the guessing sheets to guess the former, and use the writing sheets to write about the latter. Have plenty of sheets available.
8. At the end of the day, examine the sheets and tally the guessing votes. Students earn points for guessing correctly. If they guess incorrectly, points go to the author of the fake origin chosen.
9. Prepare a sheet showing the correct answers for the day, the authors of all the fake origins, and how many points they earned.
10. From among the fake origins written that day, choose three to post the following day. I often tweak or embellish the writing to make it sound more formal and believable; it's your judgment call. Record the authors in your table, then print a sheet listing the two place names and their four possible origins each. Also print new place names on which students can write the following day.
11. The following day, remind students that if they see their fake origin among the choices, they must not tell anyone or they won't get any votes.
12. On the final day, there is no writing, just guessing.
13. Add up all your points and announce your winners.

BULWER-LYTTON BAD WRITING CONTEST

1. Announce the contest ahead and read a couple samples, such as winners from the official contest (see <http://www.bulwer-lytton.com>). Announce your time line and awards. I have run contests lasting from one to three weeks; determine what works best for your school.
2. When a student submits an entry, make sure it follows the rules. I offer lollipops for legitimate entries, limit two entries per student.
3. Type a list of entries, keeping the list of authors separate. Regularly post new entries where students can read them. If you start getting too many, cull them.
4. After the deadline, eliminate all but about fifteen of the best of the worst, and e-mail teachers to ask them to vote for their favorites.
5. Read the winners in assembly and/or publish winners in the literary magazine.

MICROFICTION MPROVS

1. Set up your schedule and check with English teachers about offering extra credit. Decide what other awards to offer.
2. Announce the contest and read a sample story.
3. Schedule a few minutes with every English class to gather words, names, and phrases to use for this contest. Urge creativity. Don't use the names of people at school and don't use the names of obscure people. Place names are fine.
4. Type all words and phrases submitted (add your own if you like), print them out, and cut them up. Put them in a container.
5. When students sign up for the contest, have them draw five words/phrases from the container. If younger students don't know what a particular word means, let them draw others—but expect older students to look up words that they don't know.
6. Write down each student's words and have him or her write them down as well. Keep the word slips (stored elsewhere so they won't be drawn again, but kept so that if you run out, you can reuse them). If a student forgets his or her words, you have a master list.
7. When students submit their stories, cover their names, give the story a number, and post the stories where students can read them. Keep a master list of stories with their authors. I give the students about three weeks to write their stories and then a week to vote on them.
8. Prepare voting sheets that include the titles and numbers of all the stories as well as the voting rules. Do not include author names.
9. Make voting sheets available for a week. Score the votes however you want.
10. Distribute awards to winners, read the overall winning story in assembly, and publish the winners and runners-up in the literary magazine.

THE "MY FAVORITE BOOK" MATCHING CONTEST

1. Figure out the dates and duration of your contest; I run mine for one week.
2. E-mail teachers the contest details a couple weeks before you start, and solicit their entries. Send a reminder a week beforehand if you don't have enough entries, or if teachers neglected to include a reason why the book is a favorite. If you can't get teachers to give a reason, you can include a short plot summary with the title when you type the list.
3. Announce the contest and read some samples from teacher entries or make up funny fake ones. For example, I listed the librarians' spurious favorites as **Library of Congress Subject Headings: 100 Years, 1860-1960**, and **Silence Is Golden** by Noah Speekyng.
4. Type the teacher lists, grouped by fives, and separate the teachers' names from their titles. Be sure to keep a list of which name goes with which title! I number the titles and then leave spaces beside teachers' names for students to write in the title number of their guess.
5. Post a large-font version of each list and use smaller-font versions as guessing sheets. Remember to include a place on the guessing sheets for students to write their names and grades. If you use "Blue/Gold" points or similar scoring, leave space for that as well.
6. Print out copies of the guessing sheets, and make them available near the posted lists.
7. Print sheets on which students can write their own favorite book with a reason why it's their favorite.
8. When students submit entries, make sure that they have written a reasonably good explanation of why a book is their favorite. I offer lollipops for legitimate entries, one per student.
9. Type student lists by grade, scramble their names and titles (always keeping track of the answers!), and post whenever you have gathered five good ones. I choose the most distinctive titles to post, trying not to include the same title more than once on a list of five (which can be difficult when every student's favorite book is a **Harry Potter!**).
10. Print guessing sheets for each group, to keep near the list.
11. Check the supplies of guessing sheets daily, and replenish when necessary.
12. Add up points daily; one point for each correct match (no points for matching themselves with their favorite book!), and one point for each favorite book that a student contributes. Post results near the lists and also in your daily bulletin, Web site, etc.
13. At the end of the contest, announce the winning points. If you want, keep track of which students earned the most guessing points for their team, and give them a small reward. ■



After many years in east coast schools, including St. Paul's School for Boys in Brooklandville, Maryland, where many of these contests originated, Rebecca C. Moore has just completed her first year as a librarian at The Overlake School in Redmond, Washington. At this coed, independent school serving grades five to twelve, she has had great fun introducing library contests to middle schoolers, and is always on the lookout for more ways to connect students with books and writing. Her article, All Shapes of Hunger: Teenagers and Fanfiction, appears in the April 2005 issue of VOYA. Contact her at rmoore@overlake.org.