

TeenLibrarian

Monthly Newsletter
www.teenlibrarian.co.uk



Welcome to the final edition of TLM for 2012 sneaking in just under the wire – late again but it has been a busy December. But enough of my feeble excuses! We open with good news – The Doncaster Book Award is now celebrating its ninth year and you can find out more about the award and how it is run.

Have you ever wondered how a zombie apocalypse can help with youth literacy? Well even if you haven't you will find out in *The Zombies of Tullamore* - an excellent article by Dr Matthew Finch. Following on from the shuffling undead we have an eyewitness account of the Mass Lobby for School Librarians march on Parliament by Caroline Fielding.

Author Jeff Norton has provided an article on School Libraries (as economic incubators) he is also the subject of the Eight Questions With... interview at the end. Between the article and the interview there is also information on the YLG Unconference taking place in January – if you are not sure what an unconference is take a read and then sign up as there are still some places available (it is free).

Doncaster Book Award

The Doncaster Book Award is now enjoying the ninth successful year. It started as a very small project involving a few Secondary Schools in Doncaster and came about as a result of students following the Carnegie Medal voicing their opinion on how unfair it was that they didn't have a say as to which book won the award so we decided to do something about it.

A group of school librarians got together and devised an award that would be completely child-led with absolutely no adult input whatsoever putting children in the driving seat and making an award that was a true reflection of what kids were reading and wanting to read. We worked jointly with Public Libraries who provided statistics of books that were borrowed most from the previous year and a long list was devised from this.

The award soon generated interest and money was then given to us from at first the LEA then from the Mayor and then other literacy focused “pots” within schools. Our priority was to develop an interactive website so that the award was very visible and more children (even the ones whose schools weren't involved) could take part. As the award grew the money within schools became scarcer so we had to find money from elsewhere, we decided it was necessary to try and obtain funding from bigger pots, for example National Lottery funding, in order to do this we became a company limited by guarantee, a non for profit social enterprise. This was a massive learning curve for a set of school librarians/teachers! We had lots of free help from the local CVS and other bodies in order for us to set up but the rewards were tremendous!

We successfully gained funding from Awards for All, the Arts Council and Coalfields Regeneration Trust, as well as smaller amounts of money from Waterstones and Doncaster Rotary St Leger. This enabled us to provide loads of events for the now over 70 Primary and Secondary Schools, as well as some schools from outside Doncaster who now shadow the award.

Last year was our biggest year up to now, we incorporated the Olympic theme and the finale was a great achievement and we were used as a case study by the National Lottery. Children took part in a “Lit's a Knockout” event using reading and sport as the focus as well as meeting three wonderful authors the children attempted and broke the world reading relay record, see website for more information.

www.doncasterbookaward.net

Every year we now endeavour to find new and innovative ways of engaging children of all abilities to take part and to enjoy reading for pleasure, we look at exploring books in different ways for example drama and illustration and we try to use venues other than school like local arts venues, public libraries and stately homes showing how

flexible and diverse the enjoyment of books and reading can be.

This year we have three lists, one Primary, one Secondary and we are revisiting some Classic books, we are working closely with a local theatre company and intend to have a "Mad Hatter's tea party" in the grounds of a stately home in Doncaster as well as the usual visits to Seven Stories and illustration and drama workshops surrounding the books on the three lists.

Lesley Hurworth
Chair Doncaster Book Awards Ltd

The Zombies of Tullamore



How far would you go to engage and motivate young library users?

Would you give areas of your library a special theme?

Would you hold special events to draw in new readers?

Would you summon the walking dead?

On November 9th, 2012, children and teens in the rural Australian town of Tullamore faced down zombie hordes in the name of literacy.

They thought they were visiting the public library for a writing workshop.

Even when they found the place abandoned, vandalised, with bloody hand-prints and dire warnings scrawled on its walls, they were unmoved: "Is this going to be some kind of murder mystery game or something?"

It was only when the moans rose from the street outside and they saw a dozen zombies lurching towards them out of the midday sun that they realised the truth.

Tullamore's kids faced a desperate battle for survival. With only the library's books at their disposal...how could they save themselves from the siege of the undead?

This unique live-action workshop came into being as part of a collaboration with the library service of Parkes Shire, New South Wales. Tullamore is a remote community of

just 200 souls, and rarely gets visitors for special events. (More often, local kids have to be bussed 100km to the town of Parkes for educational activities and workshops).

We decided to give Tullamore a special treat – and a hell of a fright – by summoning zombie hordes in the name of literacy and library outreach.

America's Centers for Disease Control had already created a comic book which encouraged Americans to prepare for real-life disasters by offering the example of surviving a zombie outbreak. [You can read my interview with the Centers for Disease Control online.](#)

Inspired by their example, I called on the local Fire Service to join in a zombie siege role-play event. Tullamore is prone to being cut off by floods, so disaster preparedness is a genuine necessity for these rural kids and teens. The firefighters joined a partnership with [ParkesShire Libraries](#) – a daring, creative library service that isn't afraid to try [unusual activities like real-life Angry Birds or spooky werewolf roleplay forteens](#) – and [Tullamore Central School](#), which prides itself on finding innovative solutions to the needs of isolated rural students.

The school's motto is 'Learn by doing' – exactly what happened as students found themselves using library resources to research zombie survival. This involved making lists of items needed in case of a disaster, using town maps to create a short-term escape plan, and then debating where the survivors should go if all Australia was overrun by the zombie outbreak.

(My favourite answer came from a boy whose elaborate plan follows: "Drive to Dubbo, then get on the river to Adelaide – I reckon the zombies would have problems with the river. Once we get to Adelaide, we take a boat to Rabbit Island. I reckon we could wipe out all the zombies there and dig in until rescuers arrived.").

The aim was to deliver a low-cost, high-excitement event that would have local children and young people talking about the library for weeks to come. A minimal budget covered packed lunch for the students, zombie make up and facepaint, printing and photocopying, and my fee as organiser. The zombies were drawn from the ranks of local librarians and community volunteers – great stuff as there's nothing like seeing one's own gran or aunty turned into a zombie to chill a child to the very marrow!

Working in mixed-age groups so that older

teens could guide younger children and support them through the drama, the day was a great success - from the Year 4 student who admitted, 'I've already got a zombie survival plan for my home!', to the Year 12 students who used their knowledge of horror movies like *Zombieland* to shape their escape plans, everyone produced high quality work.

Even once the kids had escaped the undead horde (by using fake blood and disguising themselves as zombies), the literacy benefits went on, with follow-up activities through the subsequent week.

Tullamore Central School principal Sandra Carter explained: "Children talked non-stop about the event: planning, writing, thinking about the audience they were writing for. These were fantastic learning outcomes, the older students helping the younger ones, and they didn't even realise they were doing all this learning!"

Public libraries benefited from the event too. Shellie Buckle, Manager of Cultural, Education and Library Services at Parkes Shire Library, added: "The zombie event at Tullamore provided a unique opportunity for the school and the library to work together on a project for the benefit of youth literacy. It provides an opportunity for us to engage with the public differently, break down barriers, and hopefully encourages our members to use us more."

The event was a huge success and unique in Tullamore's history. There was extensive radio and online coverage from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, and [you can find out more about the event on Australia's 2012 National Year of Reading blog](#).

I hope the success of our zombie event will inspire librarians everywhere to be even more daring in their youth outreach activities. How much drama can you infuse into your workshops? Can you convince your users to suspend their disbelief and enter a world of terror and drama? It only takes a little face-paint and a smattering of fake blood to turn your library into the front line of World War Z...

Dr Matthew Finch

Dr. Matt Finch is a writer and community outreach consultant – find out more at www.matthewfinch.me/about

UK School Librarians Lobby Parliament

On Monday 29th October, the first day of half term, about 200 Librarians, authors,

illustrators, teachers and students lobbied Parliament about making school libraries statutory and inspected by Ofsted. A number of teachers at my school thought I was crazy to want to be OfSTEDed until I explained the rationale that it means schools will be judged on their Librarian and Library provision, so Headmasters will value them more and keep them! We marched, carrying fantastic placards and wearing fantastic t-shirts designed by Barbara Band of the SLG, along the Embankment to Parliament, where some of us went in to meet with MPs. A lot of people had very positive meetings, and out of it came Early Day Motion 647

(<http://www.parliament.uk/edm/2012-13/647>) for MPs to sign, a formal motion submitted to debate in the House of Commons. It states "That this House notes that one of the Government's priorities is for all children to read daily for pleasure; believes that every school should have a well-stocked library; further notes that research shows that children who have access to a school library and who read for pleasure reach higher levels of attainment in all subjects; further notes that the best way to encourage children to read for pleasure is by free voluntary reading; and calls on the Government to continue to take all necessary steps to encourage school libraries.". It isn't too late to get your MP to sign it, although rather depressingly in the explanation of EDMs on www.parliament.co.uk it says that they're rarely debated even if they get hundreds of signatures. But the day got in lots of newspapers, was mentioned on local radio, more local MPs are aware and so looking into local provision, and it was brilliant advocacy for the profession!

Caroline Fielding

Reframing School Libraries (as Economic Incubators)

High school is a tough place at a tough time in the lives of teens. The social hierarchy of any school-yard is complex, unforgiving, and ever changing. Teenagers need a safe space to explore who they are, be themselves, and discover that they're not alone.

School libraries are the safe harbour in the storm of adolescence.

It's too easy to suggest that school libraries are a relic of the analogue world. The books themselves are an important part of the value proposition of libraries (allowing teens to lose themselves in someone else's fictional problems or explore the truth

within non-fiction), but what is often overlooked is that the school library is literally the only place on campus that is the safe space; a place of study, reflection, and exploration. That physical, mental, and emotional space is the uncelebrated value of school libraries.

To think about school libraries only as repository of books is to think of churches as storage units for stained glass.

The school library is the one place on school property where anyone can seek refuge. It's a welcoming, comforting place to escape the bullying (physical, but more often emotional), daily social upheaval, and gang-like cliques of the teen landscape.

The school library is a type of demilitarized zone in the war for daily high school survival. It's the one place where students who are serious about intellectual exploration can feel accepted and unashamed about wanting to excel. It's the one place where loners, geeks, and misfits can escape to through fiction or fuel their interests with non-fiction.

Why do we need to protect and nurture these young people?

Just look at the world's most valuable companies and take note of who's in charge. It's the kids who took shelter in the library, the geeks and nerds, who are reprogramming our future.

Of course books are important, they are the ultimate tools in self-guided learning, but they are only part of the value equation. By providing the one safe space to shelter, protect, and nurture our most intellectually curious students, school libraries aren't just rooms filled with books, but are incubators for the economic drivers of tomorrow.

The geeks, nerds, and keeners (those were the words in my school days, insert your own here) in high school are our future entrepreneurs, coders, and leaders. Perhaps their budget should come not from the department of Education, but from Trade & Industry.

School libraries are where future world-changers ground themselves, recharging their intellectual curiosity and emotional fortitude to survive another day in the relentless melee of the school yard. Let's re-frame the discussion on school libraries and treat them for what they are, the very, very, very early start-up incubators

for the country's imagination and initiative.

And we only need to take one look at our recent economic performance to accept that we need these incubators more than ever.
by Jeff Norton

Originally from Canada, Jeff Norton is a London based film-maker and the author of the METAWARS saga from Orchard Books.
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YLG Unconference

Bolingbroke Academy will host a day of book talking, problem solving, crafty, library workers passionate about children's libraries & literature.

Do you work in a school or public library? Want to share your passion for working with children and young people in libraries?

Are you a blogger, reviewer, publisher or writer interested in children's literature and networking with enthusiastic people who work with children in libraries? There will be something for you too!

Come along and share your thoughts, ideas, problems (and solutions!).

(You don't have to be a member of YLG or CILIP to take part.)

Design and bring your own name badge - prizes for the best!

10am start, bring your own lunch (& cake to share if you feel bakey).

We'll spend the morning on library based talking, and the afternoon will be book themed, with opportunities to meet publishers and authors.

<http://ylgunconference.wikispaces.com/>

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Thanks go out to:

Lesley Hurworth
Dr Matt Finch
Jeff Norton
and Caroline Fielding

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Eight Questions with... Jeff Norton

Q1 What influenced your decision to write for Teenagers?

I was a very reluctant reader as a young teenager and I wanted to create a book series that would give teen readers something as exciting and as compelling as the best films and video games. That's the spirit behind MetaWars.

Q2 How do you get into the heads of your characters?

I'm blessed and cursed with an exceptionally good long-term memory and I can clearly remember my teenage years like they were yesterday (and not twenty years ago!) and so I transport myself into that emotional place. I also visualise what's going on in the story and role-play my way into the plot. With our hero, Jonah, I would conjure him up and ask myself the same question that I hope all readers will ask: *what would I do?*

Q3 Do you know instinctively what will appeal to Teens or is it more a hit or miss process?

I don't think you ever really know what will appeal to any reader, regardless of age. I view myself as a servant to the story. Everything I do is in service to telling a great story, and it's my hope and belief that a great story will find an enthusiastic audience. I think the most cynical thing adult writers can do is to try to engineer what they think will be "big" with the kids.

Q4 What is the most satisfying part of the writing process for you?

I love building worlds. I spend a lot of time creating the world of the story and it's very important to me that the world works. By that I mean that the story-world has rules and physics and never violates its own paradigms.

MetaWars actually contains two worlds, a dystopian future real world and an online virtual world. It was great fun being the architect of both of those places. They became very real for me, and hopefully they feel real to the reader.

Q5 Do you ever read the works of other Teen/YA authors? If yes what can you recommend?

I don't read as much fiction as I used to because I don't want another narrative voice in my head. But there are a few that come to mind. Philip Reeve's 'Mortal Engines' books are fantastic fun, Moira Young's 'Blood Red Road' is a riveting read, and Kim Curran is a fresh, bold new voice with her debut 'Shift.' There is an awesome new book publishing in the Spring called 'Drummer Girl' by Bridget Tyler that's a roller coaster ride about a group of frienemies who form a rock band. It's a real guilty-pleasure page-turner.

Q6 Are any of your novels based on personal experiences?

Thank goodness, no! Jonah Delacroix is orphaned, shot at, tortured, and left for dead on more than one occasion. I grew up in a suburb of Toronto, Canada, where the most action I saw was stomping evil mushrooms on my Nintendo! While the plots are not based on anything personal, I do draw the emotional lives of my characters from both personal experiences and acute observation.

Q7 Are you working on anything new at the moment or do you have anything planned?

I'm completing the MetaWars saga right now, which ends with an epic climax in the fourth book. Beyond that, I'm working a very funny, yet poignant, book about high school called 'Alienated.' It's based on the secret (and leaked) diary entries of a fourteen year old in America called Sherman Capote who is the only human boy in the high school for aliens at Area 51. It's an amazing, true story that's never been told!

Q8 Do you ever do Library visits to Teen Reading Groups? If yes, what is the best way to get into contact with you or your agent about it?

I'm happy to meet up with teen reading groups, either in person or virtually using skype. The best way to reach me is via my publisher, Rebecca Hearne, at rebecca.hearne@hachettechildrens.co.uk. You can always keep up to date with my writing and film projects at www.jeffnorton.com, and please say hello at: www.facebook.com/thejeffnorton