

HOW TO DO A READING FAIR AND LIVE TO TELL ABOUT IT

When Science Fair time comes, many kids bow out early:

they're not up to making a science project, or their parents aren't. Science fair has become THE competitive all-school event in American education. Aside from sports, there are few other competitions for kids; reading fair offers a new venue of competition for the Readers in our midst. It works for all ages, and can be scaled down or up, depending on your energy and space. Best of all, it costs next to nothing, and is lots of fun.

Reading fair *should* be:

Kids making tabletop projects that illustrate or personify their favorite books, kids judging the events, kids having a great time with books and sharing thoughts about books they've read and sharing books as well. Here are a few ideas:

- A Barbie doll dressed up like Ms Frizzle from the Magic

Schoolbus series, with a display of the books.

- A log cabin made of Lincoln logs, to resemble Laura Ingalls Wilder's Little House on the Prairie**
- A homemade Raggedy Ann doll and a display of her adventures, with a map.**
- A batch of blueberry muffins made after reading Blueberries For Sal, with the recipe displayed alongside the book.**
- A pot of homemade pasta, nice and hot, made from scratch after reading the tale of Strega Nona. Recipe should be included; magic ring and three kisses optional.**
- Kids dressing up like their favorite book character. As part of the requirement have them submit a Polaroid photo of themselves in costume for posterity, then encourage them to wander around the exhibit area to add color and excitement.**
- You could even have them be greeters at the door, or the ones who do door prize drawings on stage.**
- A group of kids may want to get together to do a skit, for instance of Charlotte's Web and the state fair scene. This kind of project oriented cooperation is to be encouraged at all opportunities.**
- Kids can participate in Reading Fair by creating their own version of favorite board games, with book characters,**

scenes, even covers added onto the board. •Kids might be able to cook up a chess set based on a book, or a variation of Parcheesi or even Reader Scrabble.

- Take an old Monopoly Game, and replace the old streets with “book related” places: Mulberry Street, Sesame street, Baker Street.
- Rename places on the Monopoly board after favorite book or Mother Goose characters.
- Make your own set of playing cards to play GO FISH or OLD MAID with books instead of playing cards. You need four of a kind.
- Build your own Trivial Pursuit game with tantalizing questions about favorite book characters: How did Fudge get his name? What did Big Anthony forget to do to the pasta pot?
- The venerable art of the shoebox diorama can be utilized for ANY book, any scene, any song, any poem.

Art projects are the easiest thing for kids to do to externalize books

- Use Lois Ehlert’s COLOR ZOO or COLOR FARM to create a primary color overlay mural.
- Build a “Swimmy” scene using Pepperridge Farm goldfish and glue on a paper plate (blue for the ocean, of course)

- Make Raymond Briggs' Snowman using Ivory Snow made into a paste and whipped up to a snowy froth**

Certainly cooking and reading should be connected whenever possible

- Make Stone Soup after reading the book by Marcia Brown**
- Make Gingerbread men and play a tape of the story of the Gingerbread boy, or make a video.**
- Make Thundercake, based on the book by Patricia Polacco.**

If we are going to succeed in this century at making reading fashionable and irresistible, it will be because we make events like this happen.

How to set it up

1. **Ask every kid to participate, but allow the less ambitious kids to combine efforts with others. Group efforts should be rewarded for building skills of cooperation and group dynamics. Make certificates of participation on the computer. Make award ribbons from satin with notary gold seals stapled to the ribbon. You can make a hundred in about an hour.**
2. **Limit the time for this: one week to get ready, and one week to display. Announce it in January, and schedule the fair in late January or early February.**

- 3. Make prizes appropriate. Reward reading with books, not pizza. Most bookstores are more than happy to give you bookmarks, \$1 off coupons, free posters, sometimes even a gift certificate. Many bookstores get free buttons, bookmarks and other book-related items from publishers and they would be happy to see them go to good use. Ask and it shall be given. Call every bookstore within a hundred miles. Be sure to give them credit in your program which will list them as sponsors.**
- 4. Encourage kids to limit their tabletop displays to fit inside a box (the kind that holds four six-packs) so you don't get any 4x6 foot plywood sheets with salt-dough maps of Lord of the Flies, like some teachers I know.**
- 5. Invite parents to come and video, photo and act as audience, but make the judges be kids. This should be a kid event, and the one sure way to keep it honest is to make the kids their own judges. The easiest way to judge is have a program you give out at the door which is the ballot. Teachers can have kids do voting in the classroom, or they can drop the ballot in a box in the reading fair.**
- 6. Stress the HOMEMADE quality of exhibits. You could go out and buy something really just for this, but the kid who rummages around in the bottom of the toybox and finds**

the things to really put together a kid-like exhibit is the one you want to reward. This is a contest where slickness needs to be penalized.

7. Have kids bring in exhibits for classroom display on Monday.

Let the class help make signs, take photos, and choose their favorite for a Class Level Ribbon. Then arrange for each grade level to have a portion of the all-purpose room set aside for them for Wednesday. Thursday, let all the kids wander in and out, and vote on their favorites.

Thursday is the day for the "edible" exhibits to have their free samples ready to give away. Friday, video the whole thing, take photos, give out prizes, and let the kids take home their displays.

8. Invite parents to come on Thursday night for a "Finer Things

in Life" party and have chocolate of all kinds for snacks, and teas and coffee in the exhibit area. The ribbons and awards aren't given until Friday, so everyone can enjoy all the displays without the feeling of "my kid did a better job than your kid" creeping in, as it so often does in science fair.

9. The voting "booth" should be a refrigerator box voting

booth. Each kid should get to vote once. The ballot should include the names and booth numbers of all the displays

up by Thursday (done by a teacher or parent, most likely).

10. Invite the newspapers to attend, since many of the exhibits will be camera worthy. TV may be interested too, so don't consider it an imposition to call the "options" or "features" editor of all the TV stations and let them know that you have this incredible photo opportunity for them.
11. You might even want to compile a book of ideas for future Reading Fairs and sell it to other schools and libraries, since there is apparently nothing out there.
12. If you enjoy this, please send me information so I can share it NEXT year with other readers. Good luck, and happy reading

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