



Created by the
ALA Public Programs Office and YALSA
with cooperation from YALSA's Outreach to Young Adults with Special Needs Committee

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Introduction

The Great Stories CLUB is a book club grant program organized by the American Library Association Public Programs Office (PPO) and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA), with a grant from Oprah's Angel Network, to provide troubled teens with the opportunity to discuss books relevant to the challenges in their lives. Complete information, including updates on future grant opportunities for libraries, is available online at www.ala.org/greatstories.

This resource guide was put together by the ALA Public Programs Office, the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA), and YALSA's Outreach to Young Adults with Special Needs Committee. The purpose of this guide is to provide a framework of tips, advice, and resources for librarians holding Great Stories CLUB book discussions in their communities.

We hope to learn and hear from you as project directors. Please let us know how your programs are going by e-mailing publicprograms@ala.org. We welcome all feedback.

Sincerely,

ALA Public Programs Office

Young Adult Library Services Association

Program Credits

American Library Association

The American Library Association promotes the highest quality library and information services and public access to information. The oldest and largest library association in the world, ALA has more than 65,000 members, representing all types of libraries and librarians as well as trustees, publishers, and other library supporters.

ALA Public Programs Office

The mission of the ALA Public Programs Office is to foster cultural programming as an integral part of library service in all types of libraries. The unit provides leadership, resources, training, and networking opportunities that help thousands of librarians and libraries nationwide develop local cultural opportunities for adults, young adults, and families. Since 1983, major donors have awarded more than \$15 million to the Public Programs Office to support library programming initiatives.

Young Adult Library Services Association, a division of ALA

The mission of the Young Adult Library Services Association is to advocate, promote, and strengthen service to young adults as part of the continuum of total library service, and to support those who provide service to this population. YALSA is the fastest growing division of ALA.

YALSA's Outreach to Young Adults with Special Needs Committee

The function of YALSA's Outreach to Young Adults with Special Needs Committee is to address the needs of young adults who do not or cannot use the library because of socioeconomic, legal, educational, or physical factors; to serve as a liaison between these groups and their service providers; and to identify and promote library programs, resources, and services that meet the special needs of these populations.

Oprah's Angel Network

Funding for the Great Stories CLUB was provided by a grant from Oprah's Angel Network. The network is a nonprofit organization dedicated to inspiring people to make a difference in the lives of others.

Program, Theme, and Titles

The Great Stories CLUB is a national book club program targeting troubled teens, organized by the American Library Association Public Programs Office (PPO) and Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA), with a grant from Oprah's Angel Network. The goal of the program is to provide troubled teens with the opportunity to discuss books relevant to the challenges in their lives. Book selections, theme and program support materials are developed by YALSA's Outreach to Young Adults with Special Needs Committee.

The theme for the Great Stories CLUB is "Life is full of choices." One choice can lead to another. Some can take us down the wrong path, and others can lead us to glory. Our background leads us down a road that is chosen for us, but eventually we choose our own path.

Each of the three books selected for the Great Stories CLUB focuses on a character that struggles with a choice that will determine the course of his or her life.

The primary titles are:

***Sold* by Patricia McCormick**

Hyperion, 2006

Thirteen-year-old Lakshmi is sold into prostitution in Calcutta when her Nepal village is hit by a monsoon. Drugged, raped, and beaten, she must find a way to escape.

***Tyrell* by Coe Booth**

Scholastic, Inc., 2007

Tyrell can't get a break. He is living in a shelter with his mom and little brother, his father is serving time in jail, and his girlfriend is supporting him. He is desperate to find a way to make money to get himself out of this slump.

***Hole in My Life* by Jack Gantos**

Farrar, Strous & Giroux, 2002

The author tells how he was able to rise above an arrest for smuggling drugs and doing time in jail and become an acclaimed writer for teens and children.

Tips for Project Directors

Running a Great Stories CLUB Book Discussion for Teens

Remember that the purpose of the Great Stories CLUB is to reach out to troubled teens by encouraging a love of reading and books. The discussion should be lively and engaging.

- Prior to meeting with the teens, read the book you are discussing carefully—often it requires two readings. Keep notes on characters and plot so that if there is a question or someone needs reminding you can fill in the gaps.
- If you get to choose the time when the discussion is taking place, try to pick a time of day when the teens will be alert and active. First thing in the morning and just after a meal are generally the most ideal times.
- Think of a fun way to have the teens introduce themselves and get to know you.
- Introduce simple rules and expectations that the group will follow (for example, read and finish the book, raise your hand to speak and wait to be recognized, respect each other's opinions). If working with a detention facility, make sure that your rules are in line with the institutional rules.
- Try to create a comfortable, open atmosphere. Remember, and remind the teens, that the discussion is not a test and they won't be judged or graded in any way.
- Food encourages informality and conversation. Check with the staff where you will be holding the group to see if food is allowed. If the food becomes a distraction, serve it at the end.
- Set up the room so that all participants can see each other (in a circle if possible).
- Use open-ended, personal questions (for example, How did it make you feel? What do you think about ...? What would you do if ...?). At the same time try to steer away from purely personal digressions. Avoid questions that can be answered with a yes or no.
- If discussion has completely stalled, or if students haven't read the book, try reading a passage or chapter out loud and discussing just that section.
- Use the Great Stories CLUB discussion questions provided in this guide or help the teens to create their own discussion questions and let group members each ask and facilitate a question. This will encourage participation and take the focus off you.
- Your role is one of facilitator: keep the discussion rolling and keep it on track. Don't let yourself become a "leader" or "teacher," remain a guide.

- Incorporate a writing exercise, activity, craft, or fun quiz that is related to the book. Sometimes busy hands help get the mind working. Check to see what is allowed in the setting where you are working.
- Continuing discussions: If you are able to continue the program with the same group of teens, be prepared with several read-a-likes for the book you discussed. See the “Related Reading for Participating Teens” brochure for a related reading list, or consult the resource guide for other “best of” lists for teens. Also, you may provide the teens with the related reading brochure (in PDF format online) at the end of the series. This way teens may read more on their own afterwards, or you can choose the next discussion book together as a group.
- Explore the access the teens will have to related reading books and try to expedite that access through your library.

DOs and DON'TS for Running a Discussion Program

DO

- Maintain discipline and focus.
- Prepare more questions and activities than you need in case discussion stalls.
- Keep it fun.
- Keep the discussion rolling.
- Encourage everyone to contribute.
- Empower the teens as much as possible by soliciting their ideas and opinions for carrying out the program.

DO NOT

- Prod too much or lead answers in a certain direction.
- Contribute significantly to the discussion.
- Lecture on the book.
- Make it seem like school.
- Force anyone to talk.
- Allow one teen to dominate the discussion.

Establishing an Outreach Partnership

- If your library is not located within an organization that serves troubled teen populations, you will need to establish an outreach partnership with another organization in your community that does.
- Appropriate partner organizations include, but are not limited to, juvenile justice facilities, drug rehabilitation centers, nonprofits serving teen parents, alternative high schools, agencies serving teenaged foster children, shelters serving homeless and runaway youth, and other agencies. If you have questions about the appropriateness of a possible partner organization, please contact the ALA Public Programs Office at publicprograms@ala.org prior to completing your Great Stories CLUB application.
- Create a list of potential community partners, and decide which agency to approach. If you are not familiar with the agencies in your community that serve troubled teens, consult the yellow pages or the Internet. You may wish to search for local social service agencies, the department of juvenile justice, the department of children and family services, or any area alternative schools.
- Once you've selected a potential community partner, identify a contact person at the facility, keeping in mind who the players are and what the politics may be like. Possible contacts include directors, teachers, librarians, supervisors, counselors, and so on. There may be a Friends of the Juvenile Hall group that may be of help, a board member at your library who volunteers at a local shelter or social service agency, a reading teacher at an alternative school, or another person who can help make your case within the organization.
- Depending on what your research has yielded, speak with the director of juvenile hall, the principal of the school inside the hall, or the director of programs in the juvenile hall, for example. Potential partners may be interested to know that, by participating in the Great Stories CLUB, they will be part of a national teen services initiative of the American Library Association that is being supported by Oprah's Angel Network.
- Present your contact with a clear and simple proposal describing the program and activities you would like to implement. For a sample project proposal form, see page 9. You may also wish to use this form to gain your library director's support of the program and your participation in it.
- Work with your contact to create a workable program plan, taking into consideration such factors as institutional procedures (security clearance, authorization, and so on).

Sample Project Proposal Form

Name: _____ Date: _____

Email _____

Phone _____

Library _____

Library Address _____

Library City, State, Zip _____

Project title _____

Project description and justification: Include statement of importance of project to the community and beyond, and links to library mission and goals.

Intended audience and potential use: Whom will the project serve and how?

Collaborative partnerships: Describe the nature of the proposed collaboration and what major responsibilities would fall to each partner.

Budgetary contribution: Indicate whether budgetary support exists for this project and how the partner might contribute in terms of budget or staffing.

Timeline: Describe any preferred start and end dates or other deadlines.

Assessment: Indicate measures that might be used in evaluating the impact of the project.

Please provide any additional information that might be appropriate, including letters of support, links to any special event, thoughts on project organization.

Working in Juvenile Facilities

The following guidelines will help you to establish credibility and respect with the facility administrators, staff, and, most importantly, the teens. All are necessary components for a successful juvenile detention center partnership and program.

- Identify an internal contact: Possible contacts include directors, teachers, librarians, supervisors, and counselors. There may be a Friends of the Juvenile Hall group. Think about finding someone who has a role similar to yours in the way they interface with probation staff/youth, such as a teacher. This person can help to lead you through the process of starting the group and working with the teens. If you are unable to identify someone on staff at the institution, speak with one of the librarians already providing services to this population for support/feedback.
- Listen more than you talk. As Patrick Jones, nationally known young adult librarian and author of several critically acclaimed books for librarians and educators, says, “When partnering with correctional facilities, we must understand the need to support the goals of that institution even if they may conflict with our values” (“Reaching Out to Young Adults in Jail,” *Young Adult Library Services* [Fall 2004]:14–17). Remember that you are a guest in this institution and be respectful of that.
- Be aware of the issues that are likely to be prevalent in these institutions. They include:
 - Security: It may take time to get into the institution and set up the program. There are a lot of processes to go through, such as security clearances. The institution’s main concern is most likely security, and there are a great many things that fall under “security issues” that may surprise you.
 - Power and Control: Within the institution, you will need to be able to know what to stand up for and what to concede. It will be important to access that skill under pressure.
 - Change: The youth can be greatly affected by changes in things like staffing and routine. There can be a lot of change and turnover of youth. Youth may be removed in the middle of your program, in the middle of their most profound moment, or at other critical times. Learn to be more flexible and develop an even better sense of humor. Depending on what is happening that day with the staff and/or youth, your program may or may not happen. Some times there will be nothing you can do about it, and other times there may be something you can do. You will need to learn to tell the difference between those situations.
- Remember that your “new” ideas may have been tried or implemented before. Make sure you ask staff as well as administrators about any history. Staff may have been there longer than the administrators and know more about what has gone on in the past and also the actual daily operations.

Serving Troubled Teens

- Write up simple expectations and rules for the book discussion. Keep them short and simple (no more than five). Make sure it is something they have basic control over and that abides by the policies of the institution (for example, they may not be able to attend each session in some situations, due to a lockdown, court appearances, and so on). Ask the youth for input when developing these expectations.
- Familiarize yourself with the institution's reward and penalty system and incorporate it into your program rules.
- One of the best ways to deal with disruptive youth is to walk toward them, maintaining eye contact, while you continue with the lesson plan. If a youth is needy (for example, acting out, asking a million questions, and in general making sure they are the center of attention), stand by them so that all eyes of the class are on them. Rather than have their unmet needs run the show, keep your focus and give them the attention they need by standing near them, walking among them, or looking them in the eye.
- Be sure to establish boundaries and to enforce them consistently. Ask the staff what the consequences are for inappropriate behavior. Often the youth get "room time," then a write up. There will be different wording/levels in different institutions. It is likely that you will need to send a youth out of the room, give them room time, and otherwise show them that you understand and will enforce the rules. Often this population will test you until you follow through with the stated consequences. Once you do this, and don't try to reason with them or give them multiple chances, but instead show that you mean business and will do what it takes to have a successful class, they will generally respect you, calm down, and your session will proceed.
- Some youth may possess personas that you find intimidating or scary. Although it is true that you are working with youth who have little impulse control and can be violent, for the most part, if you relate to them as a caring human being, they will respond in kind.
- If the youth are having a hard time relating to a book, help them build connections with simple activities such as a writing exercise where they write about themselves. Make sure you tell them not to worry about things like spelling and grammar.
- Remember confidentiality. In general, use first names only when speaking about the youth.
- Before you give anything to the youth, check with a supportive staff person first. This includes items such as paper, envelopes, food—things you would never think you'd have to check with

staff first about. Check with staff to see if bringing food is ok, and have that as a reward for after the program.

- Allow extra time to pass out paper and pencils. In most institutions you will have to count the pencils and make sure you have them all back in your possession before you leave.
- Staff may interrupt your program by participating in ways that are contrary to your goals, such as lecturing the youth or writing a youth up. Over time you will find a balance between respecting the staff actions and maintaining the integrity of the group session.
- Many youth in institutions have a history of abuse. Remember that these youth may not have a lot of family or other support and be mindful of that when guiding discussions.
- Plan for the future. After you are established in the institution (having worked to establish your credibility by your excellent programming and attitude), you will have unlimited choices and options of whom to work with and how your program runs.

The Tips for Project Directors section was prepared by YALSA's Outreach to Young Adults with Special Needs Committee.

Sample Discussion Questions

Hole in My Life

- What did you like best about this book? Least?
- What did books mean to your life when you were a child? What were your favorites?
- Most of the story is told in flashback. How does Jack show whether he is talking about something in the distant past versus the setting/time frame of the story?
- Throughout the story Jack reads continuously: in high school, on the boat, in prison. What role did books play in his life?
- How have books shaped your life now?
- Describe Jack's life at the Bacon's house.
- Four convicts serving life in prison spoke to Jack's high school, warning students of the consequences of crime. How do their cautionary tales differ from Jack's own story? Which was more effective and why?
- How did Jack compare himself to the prisoners who visited his school?
- Jack read the book *On the Road*. What effect did the book have on him?
- While on the boat, Jack said he wasn't doing anything wrong by smuggling drugs; he was just afraid of the punishment. He planned to use the \$10,000 to pay for college. Is he justified? Does he feel the same way at the end of the story?
- What other choices could Jack have made other than getting involved with smuggling drugs?
- What did Jack's prison cell look like? How did it help you understand his feelings in prison?
- How did these early actions of Jack's youth lead up to the one that changed the course of his life?
- The story is divided into three sections. Why do you think the author decided to separate parts of the story? What important event occurs in each part?
- How does Gantos change as a result of what he has done wrong? What does he "become" that might not have happened without his experiences in prison?
- What is the significance of the title? What could cause a "hole" in someone's life?

- Take a look at the titles of the chapters. How does Jack signal the reader ahead of time about what will occur in the chapter? What kinds of clues do the chapter titles provide?
- Why after experiencing life in prison do you think Jack Gantos decided to become a children's author?
- Why are stories like Jack's important?

Hole in My Life discussion questions were compiled by YALSA's Outreach to Young Adults with Special Needs Committee. With questions about source material, contact yalsa@ala.org.

Sold

- What is Lakshmi's life like in her Nepal mountain home? What events create the need for her to go into the city?
- Describe Lakshmi's relationships with her mother and stepfather. What do we know about her birth father?
- Did you suspect bad intentions on the part of the "auntie" and "uncle" who escorted Lakshmi? Why do you think Lakshmi herself was not suspicious? What does this show you about her character?
- What things does Lakshmi wonder about on her journey? What ordinary objects fascinate her? How does this innocence help seal her fate?
- What kind of legends does Lakshmi hear about the city? How do these differ from what she sees in reality?
- Describe what life is like for women in India. What happens to women if they try to leave their husbands?
- Why does "Uncle Husband" tell Lakshmi not to talk? What dangers do they face crossing the border into India?
- How does Mumtaz gain control over Lakshmi? What tactics does she use to own her both physically and emotionally? What punishment does she give girls who disobey or betray her?
- Why doesn't Lakshmi have any say in what Auntie Mumtaz gives her and takes away from her?
- What do you think is the biggest reason why Lakshmi ends up giving in to living as a prostitute?

- Describe the other girls and women in the brothel. How do they accept or fight against their lives there? What does Lakshmi learn from them? In the end, what happens to them?
- Without a friend like Shoshanna, how do you think Lakshmi's experience in the brothel might have changed? Why?
- How do others reach out to help one another at the brothel?
- Why do the police pretend the brothel doesn't exist? Why don't they shut Mumyaz down?
- What does despair look like? How does Lakshmi prevent her own despair from destroying her hope? Is it destroyed in others? How?
- What happens when Monica leaves the brothel to return to the family she has supported? Do you think Lakshmi's own Ama would treat her the same way upon her return? What about her stepfather?
- What significance does Harish play besides teaching her English? Why do you think she admires him and wants to be close to him?
- Why does Lakshmi finally ask an American to help her escape? What changed her mind?
- What was the most disturbing part of this story for you?
- What did you like best about the story? Least?

Sold discussion questions were compiled by YALSA's Outreach to Young Adults with Special Needs Committee. With questions about source material, contact yalsa@ala.org.

Tyrell

- Who were the major characters in the story?
- Why did Tyrell and his family become homeless?
- Describe the Bennett Motel. What was wrong with it? What was right with it?
- What effect did living in the Bennett Motel have on Tyrell, his mother, and his brother?
- How did Mr. Mendoza take advantage of Jasmine? Name three (3) things that Jasmine and Tyrell could have done to prevent Mr. Mendoza from taking advantage of someone else.

- How did Tyrell feel about his mother? How would you feel if your mother asked you to do something illegal to support the family?
- What could Tyrell have done when his mother and father were fighting? What effect do you think this had on him? What effect do you think this had on his brother?
- When he was growing up, what kinds of things did Tyrell and his father do together? When you were growing up, what kinds of things did you and your father do together? What kinds of things did you and your mother do together? What kinds of things did you and your family do together?
- Who were the people who tried to help Tyrell and/or his family? How did they try to help? What did they do? Were they sincere or phony?
- What did Tyrell think about foster care?
- Novisha kept three diaries. One for her mother, one for Tyrell, and one for herself. How would you feel if you learned that your boyfriend or girlfriend had been keeping a big secret from you? How important is honesty in a relationship?
- What do you think about Jasmine? Is she someone that you would want to have as a friend? Why or why not? What do you think about her decision to live with Emiliano, without her sister?
- Tyrell learned that he could make money by being a DJ. If you could operate your own business, what type of business would it be? How would you get started?
- What was Tyrell's biggest mistake?
- At the end of the story, Tyrell decides to live with Cal for a couple of months. What do you think about this decision? How easy is it to do the right thing when nearly everyone around you is doing the opposite? Do you think that Tyrell will go back to school, and keep his life together until his father gets out of jail? Or do you think he will end up in jail like his father?

Tyrell discussion questions were compiled by YALSA's Outreach to Young Adults with Special Needs Committee. With questions about source material, contact yalsa@ala.org.

Related Resources for Project Directors

Suggested Reading for Anyone Working with Incarcerated Teens

Allen, Bud. *Games Criminals Play: How You Can Profit by Knowing Them*. Rae John Publishers, 1981

Anderson, Elijah. *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence and the Moral Life of the Inner City*. W.W. Norton & Company, 2000.

Anderson, Shelia. *Extreme Teens: Library Services to Nontraditional Young Adults*. Libraries Unlimited, 2005.

Baca, Jimmy Santiago. *A Place to Stand: The Making of a Poet*. Grove, 2002.

Bernstein, Nel. *All Alone in the World: Children of the Incarcerated*. New Press, 2005.

Gruwell, Erin. *Freedom Writer's Diary: How a Teacher and 150 Teens Used Writing to Change Themselves and the World Around Them*. Main Street Books, 1999. (also released as a motion picture in 2006).

Hubner, John. *Last Chance in Texas: the Redemption of Criminal Youth*. Random House, 2005.

Lerner, Jimmy. *You Got Nothing Coming: Notes from a Prison Fish*. Broadway, 2003.

Louise, Regina. *Somebody's Someone: A Memoir*. Warner, 2003.

Mondowney, Jo Ann G. *Hold Them in Your Heart: Successful Strategies for Library Services to At-Risk Teens*. Neal-Shuman publishers, 2001.

Prothrow-Stith, Deborah. *Deadly Consequences: How Violence Is Destroying Our Teenage Population and a Plan to Begin Solving the Problem*. HarperCollins, 1991.

Saltzman, Mark. *True Notebooks: A Writer's Year at Juvenile Hall*. Knopf, 2003.

Web Sites about the Juvenile Justice System and Troubled Youth

The Beat Within, www.thebeatwithin.org

An excellent program that provides writing and publishing for incarcerated youth. Check out the Write to Read Section, for lists of books written by a juvenile hall librarian.

Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice, www.cjcj.org

CJCJ is a private non-profit organization whose mission is to reduce society's reliance on the use of incarceration as a solution to social problems. In 1997, CJCJ formed the Justice Policy Institute (JPI), a

policy development and research body that promotes effective and sensible approaches to America's justice system. This Web site offers reliable information on juvenile justice statistics, study reports, and several policy reports

National Council on Crime and Delinquency, www.nccd-crc.org

NCCD is a non-profit devoted to reducing delinquency and improving the lives of young people. The group also includes the Children's Research Center. There are several resources listed on this Web site, including studies, policy papers, and other related agencies and how to access their resources.

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, www.ojjdp.ncjrs.gov

OJJDP, a component of the Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, accomplishes its mission by supporting states, local communities, and tribal jurisdictions in their efforts to develop and implement effective programs for juveniles. The Web site provides information on grant opportunities, state-level programs, links to relevant statistical information, and more.

Tolerance.org, www.tolerance.org

A web project of the Southern Poverty Law Center. Their mission is to "Fight Hate and Promote Tolerance." The Web site provides information on tolerance teaching resources for teachers, parents, teens, and children.

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