

Back to School 2026

library **bright** ideas

Reach every reader in your elementary school library.



Graphic Novel Scavenger Hunt

- Host the Best Author Visit
- Connect with Families at Open House
- Taste Chapter Books
- Transform Your Library with Stations
- Teach with Semester-Long Projects
- Light Up Reading with a Glow Party

The NEW digital
magazine for
elementary school
librarians

SCROLL
to take a look inside!



GREAT ARTICLES LIKE THESE

LIGHT UP READING: A GLOW PARTY TO KICK OFF THE SCHOOL YEAR

By Jessica Flannery

Turn Off the Lights. Watch What Happens

The first few weeks of school have flown by. Library procedures have been taught and re-taught. Students can find their way to favorite series and also find new topics in the non-fiction section. They know where to go to check out books and find a cozy spot to read. They have seen the library in its regular form and then...they walk through the library door, and the room is glowing!

Black lights cast everything in electric color. Laser lights spread color and excitement throughout the library. A child holds up their hand and watches their white sleeve blaze purple. Another tugs on a neon green necklace, wide-eyed. There are gasps. There are squeals. Someone whispers, "Is this the library?" And they all realize: yes. It is. And it has never looked like this before.

A Random, Creative Idea

I have been a Library Media Specialist for eleven years. In that time, I have run book fairs, author visits, Poem in My Pocket events, reading challenges, and



more bulletin boards than I can count. I have learned, year after year, what makes students light up. What makes them feel like the library is theirs and most importantly, feel welcome when they step through the library doors.

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CREATE CHOICE BOARDS WITH GOOGLE SLIDES

by Heather Lesoine

One of my favorite parts of being a Kindergarten through 6th grade elementary librarian is that I'm guaranteed to see all students for instructional time and book selection every year. With a fixed schedule and 45 minute classes, I typically see most classes at least 28-30 times per year. Yet, that fixed schedule also sets up the perception among students (and sometimes) staff that the library is a class that meets once per cycle and not a space or resource that is available outside of that fixed schedule. In order to diminish that perception, I offer students open hours so they can select

books or ask a question at any time, even if I am teaching a 1st grade class or having my lunch. However, there are times when the space itself is physically closed, since I travel between two libraries within the 6-day cycle.

I have always felt guilty that my students didn't have access to the library during hours or days that I am at the other library. In addition, I always felt that we had SO many resources and SO little time to share them with students (and teachers) in our limited, fixed schedule (while also traveling between buildings). That guilt was resolved just a touch when I stumbled



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FAMILY CONNECTIONS AT OPEN HOUSE

By Rachel Randall

New books, freshly sharpened pencils, and label makers cranking out names... Ah, the joys of new school year preparations!

As classrooms prepare for students, we are restarting the school library for the new year. We all want our school libraries to be welcoming and wonderful spaces. Back to school events are important in accomplishing that since they are often students' first impression of the library. In fact, open house events can be powerful not just for students, but for families as well. Open House is a unique opportunity for you to connect with families. More importantly, you can use it to invite families into reading.

So how do you accomplish that? After all, there is only a short amount of time to get the whole library ready for the school year, let alone prepare for Open House. Fortunately, focusing on three simple aspects can make a huge impact on families. Plus, preparing all three only takes the time needed to display books. I focused on these three things at my last open house event. Not only did they transform the event, but they continued to positively impact students' reading into the school year.

The first area I tweaked was the displays. **I displayed books that adults would recognize from their childhoods.**



Second, during the event, I made sure I **greeted every family**. Finally, and most memorably, I invited students to **"challenge" their adults to find their own favorite childhood books**. Smiles ensued as families worked together, exploring the library.

It helped that my school had a fun way of doing Open House. At the beginning of the event, students got a "passport" to

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HOW TO HOST THE BEST AUTHOR VISIT

by Susan Hanlon

What's one of my favorite days of the school year? It's Author Visit day, of course! As an elementary librarian, I personally love to meet authors and learn everything about them, their books and their inspirations so I can share that with my students. I'll always be that author fan-girl standing in line for an autographed book. I enjoy passing on that excitement to my students, too! I'd love to share with you my experiences, tips and reasons why it's important to expose your students to authors and illustrators with in-person visits.

As an elementary librarian for 23 years and a classroom teacher before that for 12 years my experience includes attending author events, planning events for my K-5 students and working as a committee member at a local university planning larger events for teaching professionals. I really enjoy the behind the scenes work of researching, planning, and prepping the students in addition to the BIG day! To have the most successful event and happiest authors, planning and organizing is key.

Here are some helpful tips and what my process looks like.

- Planning a year in advance gives you

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Author Doreen Cronin

the most choices in who you invite to your school and the best flexibility with dates.

- Research the author by browsing posts on library social media groups, teaming up with other librarians in your district or area, visit their website or best of all see them in action at local book store events and teacher/librarian conferences.
- Secure your funds to be sure you can afford their fees. Yes, it may seem like a lot of money, but this is their livelihood. Many authors don't make a lot of money from their book sales. Fees usually include speaking honorarium, travel and lodging.

A SEMESTER OF CREATIVITY, COLLABORATION, AND LEARNING: PROJECT IDEAS FOR YOUR LIBRARY

By Mary Mosley

A few years ago, I was asked to work with a group of 20-25 first graders during the last 30 minutes of the day, four days a week, for enrichment time for a semester. Every teacher in the school was tasked with either remediation or enrichment and (mostly) given carte blanche for what to do with that time. Initially, I read picture books, taught literacy skills, and had the kids create different products that showcased their learning. I don't think there was anything wrong with that approach, but I do think that I missed an opportunity to have lessons build upon each other in ways that led to a more exciting and interesting end.

Enter Mrs. Cartwright, a 3rd grade teacher at the time, who walked up to me and said, "I have an idea for next semester. Can you work with the 3rd graders to design and 3D print their own plants?". My heart exploded with joy, thoughts began racing through my head about how I could structure our time, and I responded with, "Yes! I can absolutely do that."

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Students using clues and knowledge about ciphers during a Breakout EDU related to The Bletchley Riddle

That conversation led to, as of Spring 2026, seven different semester-long projects in our library. Although each project is different, there are elements that

SPARKING INTEREST WITH "BOOK TASTING"

By Shannon Turner

This is one of my favorite activities to begin the school year with 4th and 5th graders. Before students select books for checking out, the library is transformed into a cozy, "Readers' Café." Students are invited to "taste" each chapter book genre by reading the first page or two while taking notes on their own personal "menu."

"Book Tasting" gets students excited about their year by acknowledging their growth as readers and the autonomy of self-selecting their own chapter books. As they sample each genre, they begin to understand their "menu" of options in the library, leaving them excited about where they'll begin. Not only are students hooked, but teachers also love it, too! Each year teachers request this activity to be completed in the first week of school.

4th and 5th graders have moved beyond learning to how to read and instead are reading to learn. These students are ready for more complex plots and subplots, complex sentence structure, and vocabulary. They are ready to read for longer sustained periods of time which serve to develop their language and vocabulary skills, along with their ability to make predictions, draw conclusions, and summarize texts. Students at this age

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are now able to make strong connections to characters, see different perspectives, and explore social situations and complex themes. Often, they begin to explore a greater diversity of cultures and lifestyles that broaden their understanding of our world. Reading a variety of chapter books in 4th and 5th grade also prepares students' stamina for the rigor in middle school texts.

ENGAGING LESSONS & ACTIVITIES

BUILDING LIBRARY CONFIDENCE THROUGH SCAVENGER HUNTS

by Clair Silliman

The beginning of the school year in an elementary library is always a bit of a whirlwind. We introduce ourselves, go over expectations and procedures, take a tour of the space, and talk about the parts of a book (with extra love for those all-important call numbers!). It's important, it's also a lot for students to take in all at once. That's why I love following up those first lessons with something a little more active: a beginning-of-the-year library scavenger hunt.

This has become one of my favorite traditions. It is a fun and easy way to empower my students to feel independently capable of chasing their own curiosities when exploring the library and finding the books they love. It equips students with the skills to feel like the library is theirs – a place they understand, enjoy, and want to come back or escape to. It transforms even the youngest students from passive learners into engaged researchers by taking everything we've just talked about and turning it into something students can do. Instead of just hearing how the library works, they get to explore it, move through it, and start finding books on their own.



Importantly, it opens the door for students to see themselves as readers. And honestly, isn't that the goal?

Why a Scavenger Hunt Works

At its core, a scavenger hunt gives students a chance to use play to apply what they learn in orientation and to overcome what may seem overwhelming. It breaks the complexity into manageable, grade-appropriate steps. Instead of simply hearing about how books are organized, students actively practice locating materials within the space. For example,

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FROM PAGES TO PLAY: BUILDING RALPH'S DREAM HOME

by Lizzie Krone

Walking into a third grade library class, you might expect quiet reading, maybe a quick checkout, and that's it. But this lesson flipped that idea completely. It turned reading into something hands-on, creative, and honestly just really fun. The whole thing centered around the book, *The Mouse and the Motorcycle* by Beverly Cleary, and instead of just reading it and moving on, the class stretched it into a full experience that lasted weeks.

I normally see all of my classes twice a week because I am part of the normal specials rotation schedule. Every class comes to the library two times a week for 25 minutes. The first day they come in during the week is usually a lesson day or in this case a project day. The second library day is checkout day. Since students only had a short amount of time during each class period, they knew they had to come in and get right to work. Even with the limited time, the project built slowly over several weeks and kept students excited the entire way through.

It all started with reading the book together. Instead of rushing through it, the class took their time and really focused on understanding the story and the



characters. During the reading, I would stop at least once every chapter to have discussions with the students. Some discussions were done as whole group conversations, while others were partner talks where students could quickly turn and share their ideas with someone next to them.

The discussions were informal, which helped students feel comfortable sharing. I would ask questions about how events in the story related to their own lives. If students felt they could not relate to something in the book, we would talk about why. We also spent time discussing

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BUILDING LIBRARY JOY THROUGH STATIONS

By Brandye Roland

Walk into my elementary library during station time, and you will find students building with magnetic tiles, solving puzzles, listening to Wonderbooks, creating origami, collaborating at the Lego wall, and eagerly waiting for their turn to check out books. The room is active, creative, and student-centered—but also structured and purposeful.

It was not always this way.

Like many elementary librarians, I once struggled to fit meaningful instruction, student engagement, and library checkout into a short class period. Early in my career, I was part of a specials rotation that allowed only thirty minutes per class.

Students rotated between PE and the library throughout the day, leaving just enough time for a quick read-aloud and checkout. While the pace was manageable for a new librarian, enrichment opportunities and deeper library lessons were difficult to incorporate.

A few years later, everything changed. My principal informed me that the following school year would include fifty-minute library periods instead of thirty-minute rotations. I was excited to have more meaningful time with students, but I



also wondered how I would successfully structure nearly an hour in the library. That summer, I began researching ideas and planning intentionally for the coming year. One of the resources that helped shape my thinking was [Library Centers for Library Learners](#) by Cari White. From there, my library station journey began.

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