



SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2023.** Please include this submission form with the electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: County of Henrico
Program Title: Open Book with Meg Medina
Program Category: Customer Service

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Victoria Davis
Title: Public Relations Specialist
Department: Public Relations
Telephone: 804-501-4933 Website: www.henrico.us
Email: dav127@henrico.us

SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Brandon Hinton
Title: Deputy County Manager for Administration
Signature:

Program Overview

In the summer of 2022, Henrico County Public Library (HCPL) held a book discussion series for tweens that turned the traditional author book talk format inside-out. HCPL partnered with award-winning author and Henrico County resident Meg Medina to plan a book discussion that would offer a socially supportive, intellectually engaging, and creatively inspiring platform for tweens to explore books with empowering themes and share their ideas about reading and writing. Ms. Medina, having witnessed the isolation and other challenges facing tweens during the pandemic, wanted to offer a chance for young people to connect over shared interests. She sought to open up a dialogue around reading and writing where she and tween program participants could discuss their favorite titles, authors, and pieces of writing advice.

Elevating the voices of young people while opening up a conversation with a celebrated author, Open Book aimed to empower tweens to explore their identities by sharing their opinions and connecting them with an inclusive reading list of diverse, under-the-radar authors and books. In addition to in-person discussions, the library used interactive book displays and an extensive engagement and promotional campaign to encourage a wider community conversation. The library's Youth Services Coordinator created the initial connection with Ms. Medina to plan her open-ended discussion, and the library's Community Relations team worked to create promotional materials, a dedicated web page, and ideas for displays and social media promotion in order to generate engagement and attendance. Teen services librarians worked to connect with their tween patrons, create book displays, and promote titles from Ms. Medina's reading list.

With high attendance and participation, the program was a success. Dozens of teens attended in person, and hundreds more engaged with the campaign through interactive displays, social media, or reading featured titles. The program was such a success, it became the basis for Ms. Medina's national campaign, Cuéntame, as the newly appointed National Ambassador for Young People's Literature at the Library of Congress.

Problem/Challenge/Situation Faced by Locality

During the Coronavirus pandemic, young people experienced disruptions to their daily life and social, emotional, and intellectual development. Many caregivers, educators, and library workers have seen firsthand the impact of pandemic-induced isolation, stress, and virtual schooling on young ones in their lives. Henrico County Public Library sought to provide opportunities for young

people to connect, virtually and in person, throughout the pandemic in its youth services offerings, to promote learning and provide stimulating environments for tween and teen patrons to connect and learn. Sparked from her relationship with HCPL and her participation with the Friends of Henrico County Public Library, local author and Newbery Award-winner Meg Medina contacted the library hoping to achieve similar goals by creating opportunities for open-ended book discussions for tweens emphasizing empowering, affirming, and inclusive titles. The resulting program was called Open Book with Meg Medina. Through connecting young people with supportive literature and an enriching social learning experience, Ms. Medina and HCPL hoped to provide an inspiring environment for young people enduring unique hardships exacerbated by the pandemic.

How Program Fulfilled Awards Criteria

Libraries partnering with authors to present book discussions is nothing new, but Open Book with Meg Medina at Henrico County Public Library took an innovative approach and reimagined the format of an author book talk. With the Open Book discussion series at HCPL, a celebrated local author met with young people to discuss not just her own books, but some of her favorite authors' work, and encouraged young people to share their favorites, too. This exchange of ideas elevates the voices of youth participants while making the author more down-to-earth and accessible to them. The format could be easily replicated in communities across the state. Another innovative aspect of this program is that it was designed to respond to the intellectual and social needs of young people at a time when these needs had become harder to meet through our traditional institutions due to the pandemic.

Meg Medina has been hailed as an author who can get inside the minds of young people in her characters, and in this program the empathy of both the author and the librarians was channeled into a positive learning experience for young people. This alternative style of book discussion addressed not just traditional literacy skills like reading and writing, but also social connectedness through idea sharing, and rekindling a curiosity about reading and writing after years of virtual learning. The discussions combined the excitement of meeting a famous author with the encouragement to share one's own ideas and opinions with both the author and a group of peers.

Open Book showcases a modern understanding of the function of libraries in our communities, one that builds on the traditional role of libraries as promoters of reading and literacy, by

highlighting how today's libraries serve as community learning hubs supporting connection through information sharing and communal learning experiences. The emphasis on and validation of young people's personal taste in books elevates the acts of reading and writing from homework assignments or private pastimes into powerful choices that can help young people to express and explore their own identities. The program was designed to be inclusive in both content and structure, and sought to engage as many tweens as possible, through direct outreach to schools, options for passive participation, and selection of a diverse recommended reading list from the author. Library systems nationwide can use this more open-ended approach to book talks with tweens and local authors to increase engagement and impact. In fact, the program's success was such that Ms. Medina is now using it as the basis for a national campaign that will replicate this transformative communal idea sharing experience in public libraries, schools, and other learning spaces across the country.

How Program Was Carried Out

Meg Medina is an award-winning author and Henrico County resident, recently appointed as the National Ambassador for Young People's Literature to the Library of Congress, who has been actively involved with Henrico County Public Library (HCPL) for years. After being recognized by the County for winning the Newbery medal, youth literature's highest honor, Ms. Medina offered to participate in library activities. She spoke as a guest of honor at the Friends of HCPL Annual meeting in 2021 and afterward expressed interest in holding a program for young people, specifically tweens in grades 4-6, at the library. Her vision developed into a program proposal that hoped to address some of the effects of isolation and learning gaps caused by virtual learning that tweens had experienced over the pandemic years.

Working with HCPL's Youth Services Coordinator, Ms. Medina proposed a book discussion group to take place at libraries across the county that, instead of covering a single title in extended discussion, would invite participants to share with the group what their favorite books are, and why, and discuss the craft of writing with a celebrated author. In addition, Ms. Medina would provide a booklist that touched on themes of empowerment and inclusivity for young people. With this exchange of ideas between young people and a bestselling author, the hope was to elevate the ideas and opinions of participants, build a sense of belonging and confidence, and to inspire a feeling of connectedness and support for tweens, both with peers and the library. Because the

idea of sharing ideas recurred throughout the planning process, the group decided to call the program series “Open Book with Meg Medina.”

Planning for the program logistics began in the spring of 2022. Ms. Medina and HCPL understood the hurdles tweens can face in attending library programs, because they are not yet in charge of their own schedules or transportation. Working with the library’s Community Relations Department and Teen Services Librarians, the Youth Services Coordinator and Ms. Medina outlined a publicity campaign to reach 4-7 graders, as well as provide opportunities for young people to engage with the themes and ideas behind the program even if they couldn’t attend in person. What resulted was a series of in-person discussions to be held at different times across the county in the summer of 2022, along with a recommended reading list distributed as a bookmark directly to schools and via libraries. In addition, interactive book displays designed around a prompt suggested by the author to be installed at each discussion location, encouraging tweens to share their ideas by writing their thoughts on post-its and create a written conversation around the titles on display. This allowed tweens to participate in the discussion, and benefit from the connection and empowerment of the campaign, even if they could not attend the in-person sessions with Ms. Medina. These displays, like the discussion programs, would invite people to share their ideas, opinions, and suggestions in response to a question related to reading and Ms. Medina’s booklist.

The library sent handbills advertising the discussions directly to each middle school and older elementary school student at the end of the school year. In addition to direct marketing to students, the program was promoted on the library’s blog, events calendar, and social media, and co-promoted by the author on her channels as well, using this text:

Tweens will have the chance to connect with Meg and other readers and aspiring writers their age to explore literature, discuss the craft of writing, and learn about awesome under-the-radar authors and their work. In addition to discussions with Meg, we invite tweens and teens to keep the conversation going all summer long: stop by teen spaces in our Area Libraries to participate in interactive displays to share your thoughts about Meg's summer reading list. Visit a library near you to attend a discussion and check out some of the incredible titles on Meg's list!

In preparation for the discussions, the library's Collection Management division ensured that the library owned copies of Meg's reading list titles. Teen Services Librarians received a set of prompts to create interactive displays that had been developed by Ms. Medina and the library's Community Relations department. A few libraries chose "Judge these books by their covers" and featured book covers from Ms. Medina's reading list and sticky notes teens could use to vote for their favorite title or cover art, and leave written comments. Another location selected the prompt, "Which of these authors would you want to write a book about you?" and included authors from Ms. Medina's reading list, other popular authors, and Meg Medina herself.

Turnout for these programs and interactions with the displays were high. The library and Ms. Medina achieved their goals of creating a supportive and inclusive environment that could help to address pandemic-induced learning gaps and social isolation, fostering both intellectual and social connections in area youth. Over four dozen teens attended discussions across the county, and over 120 interacted with displays. In 2023, Ms. Medina announced her program Cuéntame, as the newly appointed National Ambassador for Young People's Literature to the Library of Congress, which was based on the program at HCPL. Ms. Medina will now replicate the program in libraries, schools, and other educational settings across the country.

Financing and Staffing

The library already owned copies of the books Ms. Medina selected for her reading list, so there was no additional cost for the library's collection. The promotional and engagement campaign for Open Book cost \$415: \$109 to print 1000 bookmarks, and \$306 to print 3000 double-sided quarter sheets. This amount could be scaled up or down to replicate elsewhere, depending on the size of the library system. Printing promotional materials could also be done totally in-house by library systems with less funding; printing costs could be scaled up, or down to zero, depending on a library's available funds.

Staff worked together across library departments to implement this program. Open Book involved a promotional campaign in print, web, and on social media orchestrated by the library's Community Relations team in coordination with Ms. Medina's team. Teen Services librarians at Area Libraries across the county worked to create displays coordinated with the Community Relations team and Youth Services Coordinator, to host the discussions, and promote the events and reading list on a local level. The Youth Services Coordinator worked with Ms. Medina to

conceptualize and schedule the program. The Collection Management department worked to ensure the library owned copies of Ms. Medina's selected reading list titles.

Program Results

Open Book with Meg Medina had high attendance and excellent engagement with participants in person at the discussions, passively through the interactive displays in libraries, on social media, and via distribution of 1,000 reading list bookmarks. Approximately four dozen tweens attended an in-person discussion, and over 120 young people participated in the interactive displays. To put these numbers in context, this would have been a high turnout for a tween audience even before the pandemic, but after the start of the pandemic, these numbers are among the highest the library system has seen for this age group. Tween engagement with libraries can be challenging, as these readers can find themselves between areas of the library, not quite fitting into the Children's collection anymore, but perhaps not old enough for the Teen area. This is a critical age for libraries to engage young people so that they remain lifelong library users. The library needs to communicate to tweens that it remains a welcoming space for them as they age into their teen and adult years. Tween services at HCPL are continuing to grow in response to these needs. In terms of attendance, engagement, and reach for this nascent service area, Open Book was an unequivocal success.

Brief Summary

In the summer of 2022, Henrico County Public Library (HCPL) held a book discussion series for tweens that turned the traditional author book talk format inside-out. HCPL partnered with award-winning local author Meg Medina to provide open-ended exchanges of ideas around reading and writing where both the author and tween program participants could share their favorite titles, authors, and pieces of writing advice. The program aimed to engage tween library users and offer them opportunities for intellectual stimulation, self-expression, and social connection at a time when virtual learning and isolation had taken a toll on young people's well-being and learning. Elevating the voices of young people while making a celebrated author accessible on their level, Open Book aimed to empower tweens to explore their identities by sharing their opinions and connecting them with an inclusive reading list of diverse, under-the-radar authors and books. In addition to in-person discussions, interactive book displays and an extensive engagement and promotional campaign encouraged a wider community conversation. With high attendance and participation, the program was a success. It became the basis for Ms. Medina's national

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