



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: Role-Playing Games at the Library
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

Building on the pop culture enthusiasm surrounding Role-Playing Games (RPG) like Dungeons & Dragons, prominently featured in the Netflix series *Stranger Things*, Henrico County Public Library staff started hosting regular meet ups for RPG enthusiasts in a successful strategy to engage teens with library programs and collections. Starting in 2018 with one meetup group at a single library location, RPG at HCPL has expanded to include recurring meetup groups, single “one-shot” gaming adventures, and even RPG programs designed for other age groups, at library locations across the county.

RPG games at HCPL are structured and scheduled in ways that offer flexibility to teens with busy schedules. They also offer opportunities to play and socialize, which are crucial to engaging teens at the library. It’s not all fun and games of course: playing RPG requires calculating probabilities and other quick mental arithmetic. The games are often longer-form and involve sophisticated back stories, narrative plot arcs, and detailed character development that is similar to the world-building found in fantasy and science fiction books. In addition to promoting math and high order literacy skills for young people through game play, the library is also able to promote the titles in its collections through RPGs. The programs additionally foster connection between participants, and allow teens to connect with library staff. Participants often attend programs month after month, and even year after year, and it is common for teens to attend with friends or make friends with other attendees.

RPG at HCPL has been a popular program choice for teens and has grown by leaps and bounds over the past five years. Library systems across the state could easily replicate these programs and use RPG to connect teens with literature, learning, library staff, and each other.

Problem/Challenge/Situation Faced by Locality

Public libraries work hard to engage users by ensuring that collections and programming reflect and support the vibrant and diverse interests of their communities. Following pop culture trends has been one way the Henrico County Public Library has kept a finger on the pulse of its young adult and adult users’ interests. Since the late 2010s, one of the most successful initiatives at HCPL has been the Teen Role-Playing Game (RPG) series. This group gaming series tapped into a renewed interest in games like Dungeons & Dragons and Magic: The Gathering that erupted after the premiere of Netflix’s *Stranger Things*. It is a perennial challenge for teen librarians to

engage their users: teens are often not in charge of their own schedules and transportation, and are more influenced by the actions and activities of their peers than other age groups. RPG groups can offer a successful engagement strategy for teens through flexible scheduling: RPGs can take place in both recurring, episodic adventures that unfold over weeks, or “one-shot” games that take place over a couple of hours. The games also engage groups of teens socially, as players form friendships with each other over time, or attend together in existing friend groups. Role-playing games at the library can successfully engage the traditionally elusive teen demographic by making strong connections between participants, the library, and each other.

How Program Fulfilled Awards Criteria

The development of role-playing game programs at HCPL is an innovative solution to a common issue public libraries face. Engaging teen users has been a perennial challenge for libraries that is newly complicated by the effects of the coronavirus pandemic. After years of diminished youth engagement, Librarians need high-interest programs that promote reading and learning, bringing young people into the library and motivating them to keep coming back. The imaginative subject matter of role-playing games dovetails perfectly with the fiction genres found in library collections and can inspire library users to experience reading in new ways. The complex narrative arcs and character development in RPGs develop higher order literacy skills like comprehension, inference, and understanding of structure. Games like Dungeons & Dragons are inherently social, group experiences that can unite people with common interests. The games even involve a good amount of arithmetic, from basic addition and subtraction to statistical calculations and following formulas to generate “ability scores” or calculate the damage inflicted in attacks. At Henrico County Public Library, staff have found that the engaging nature of the programs helps them to build relationships with young people, and therefore improve their ability to connect them with books and resources that spark their individual interests. If libraries are places where people connect over reading and learning, RPGs are a natural fit. They are low-cost and high impact programs for youth that encourage learning, social bonds, and meaningful engagement for young people with librarians and library collections.

How Program Was Carried Out

Building on a resurgence of interest in tabletop role-playing games that began in the 2010s and grew exponentially after the release of Netflix’s Stranger Things in 2016, Teen Services staff at Henrico County Public Library (HCPL) began conducting Dungeons & Dragons meet-ups in the

summer of 2018. What started with a series of games at one location expanded to multiple monthly workshops and meetups at libraries across the county, and not just for teens: in response to popular demand, HCPL added RPG programs for adults in 2022, and is now developing programs for children to debut in 2023.

Over the past five years, HCPL has hosted over eighty role-playing events that range from tutorials on creating characters and running your own adventures to multi-week gaming experiences that take a group of players through a full story arc. The first meetup group that began at HCPL's Varina Library in 2018 was called DnD Adventurer's League. Over the course of four weeks in August, over a dozen participants joined in on an extended Dungeons & Dragons story arc. The program continued monthly after that with a dedicated core group of players. In October 2019, due to Varina Library's success, HCPL's Gayton Library on the opposite end of the county started their own weekly meetup called Dungeons & Dragons Club. Soon after, HCPL's Fairfield Library offered Intro to Dungeons & Dragons and launched a recurring D&D One-shot Adventure group. A D&D "one-shot" is a casual, introductory playing style in which a group of players can complete an adventure in as little as one session, just a couple of hours in length.

At an All-Teen Staff Development Day on March 9, 2020, all Teen Services staff were invited to experience participating in an RPG with the hope of expanding programming interest among staff. The arrival of the coronavirus pandemic paused plans for new in-person meetup groups, but RPG could be adapted to a virtual format. Using a free app called Roll 20, Teen Services staff hosted virtual D&D programs and workshops throughout the early heights of the pandemic when many library services were virtual-only. The Summer Reading event for teens, Library Con, was adapted into an online event focused on RPG games and character creation and attracted over 20 teens and tweens to a character creation workshop, a one-shot adventure for teens, and a one-shot adventure for tweens.

In 2021 when in-person programming resumed in full, teen services staff debuted new RPG happenings for teens and tweens at libraries across the county. A one-shot Mausritter adventure was offered for the first time, for players of the Mausritter fantasy adventure game for tweens, where mice are the main characters. Character creation workshops, one-shot D&D adventures, and multi-week campaigns averaged around 7 to 10 attendees. At each of these programs, books from the library's collection related to RPG games, strategy, and fantasy books with related

themes were offered to participants by librarian leaders. Then, in 2022, D&D Book Adventures: Into the Drowning Deep was first offered for adults at HCPL's Libbie Mill Library, providing a direct conduit to the library's collection for adult fans of RPG who may have grown up playing or gotten swept up in the Stranger Things excitement. Eight adults attended.

HCPL is continues taking RPG at the Library in new and exciting directions. Fairfield Library staff hosted a Tabletop Miniatures Painting event on January 18, 2023. Libbie Mill Library offered another book-based game, D&D Book Adventures: The Left Hand of Darkness, on January 27, 2023. Librarians have responded to community requests to plan workshops for tweens and elementary-aged children by scheduling expanded offerings starting in Spring 2023. In Summer 2023, a Dungeons & Dragons game series for elementary-age kids will be held at Libbie Mill Library. Additional ideas in development include a series on how to Dungeon Master (or Game Master) and a series about online tools to expand your RPG experience. Teen librarians are exploring the use of Discord to communicate with their gaming groups and offer virtual gaming experiences.

Financing and Staffing

The cost of the program is minimal, as HCPL already owns many D&D and other RPG-related guidebooks. Librarians could purchase D&D starter sets for approximately \$20 apiece, but some had staff enthusiasts bring their personal supplies. The Roll20 app was free for use during virtual programs. Additional craft supplies for character creation workshops were drawn from library supply and program budgets. A library seeking to start RPG, even without staff providing their own supplies, could spend as little as \$20 on a starter kit and offer a complete and successful program. Many of our library staff parlay their existing interest in or experience playing RPGs, and carry out program planning and hosting these programs as part of their normal public programming duties at the library.

Program Results

Role-Playing Games at the library build a sustained engagement with participants from week to week, month to month, and even year to year. While dozens of participants have attended groups over the years, a core group of approximately 10 participants seems to coalesce around each of the meetups. Friendships are formed between players, and relationships are strengthened between libraries and their teen users. Some participants have been playing at the library for

years now. One parent emailed library staff to say, *“As moms do, I signed them up without asking them...[t]hey played until 8:30!...They came busting out of the room with smiles on their faces and mouths full of words and phrases I did not understand...Kudos to the planners of this event...[it] seems to have been their favorite of the summer.”* One librarian who ran HCPL’s first meetup group said that a regular participant had aged out of the group, but still occasionally stopped by because his brother is now a member. The groups have been successful for the library in terms of program attendance, teen and other patron engagement, and harnessing the power of a pop culture phenomenon to promote library programs and collections. The groups have been successful for participants in offering a supportive and educational environment, help foster new friendships, and expose readers to books and films that might interest them.

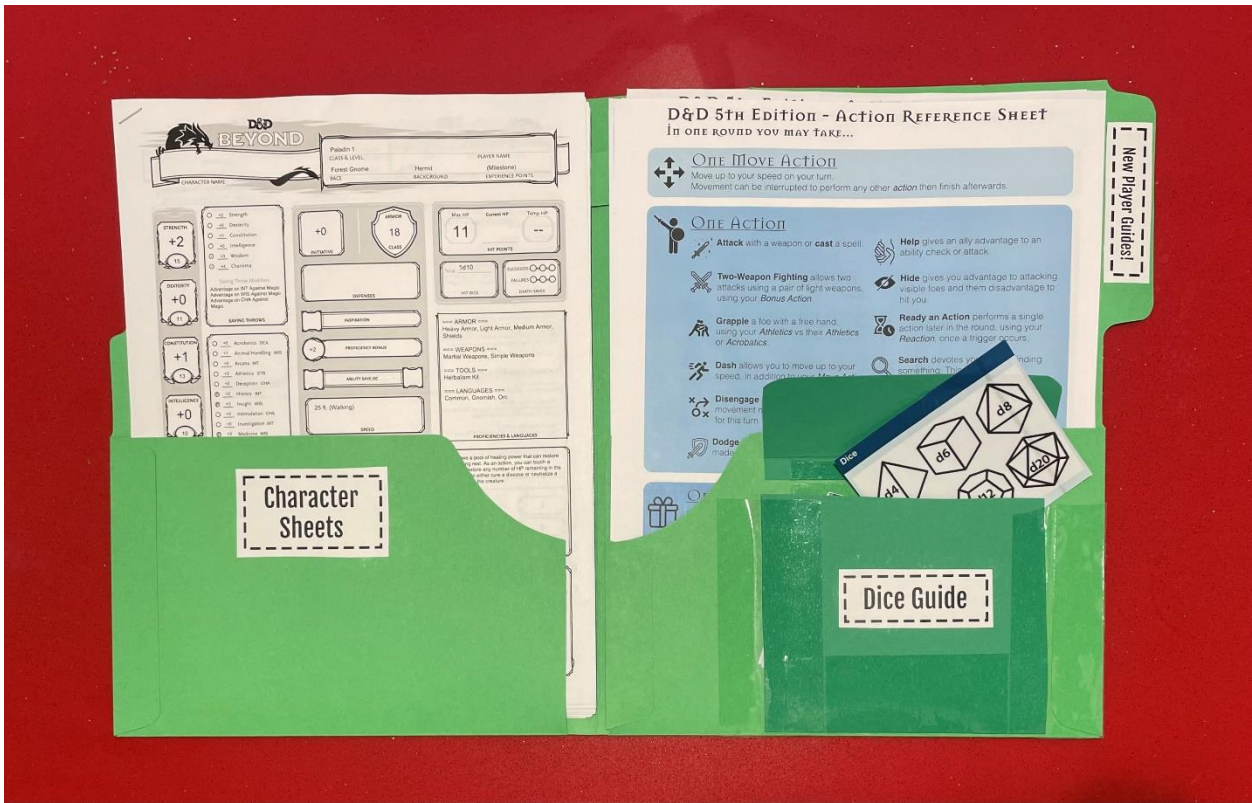
Brief Summary

Henrico County Public Library (HCPL) began hosting Dungeons & Dragons meetups for teens in 2018 at its Varina Library, and through the pandemic and beyond, role-playing game (RPG) programs at the library have shown broad appeal. While initially started in response to the pop cultural resurgence of Dungeons & Dragons after the debut of Stranger Things on Netflix, RPG programs at the library are more than a passing trend, offering lasting impacts. After an initial success at HCPL’s Varina Library, other locations in the library system created their own groups. When the pandemic temporarily halted in-person programming, RPGs could be easily adapted to virtual formats. After in-person programming resumed, meetup groups proliferated again across libraries in the HCPL system. Core groups of attendees return time and again, and due to popular demand, librarians are now developing additional programs for both children and adult audiences. RPGs are easily connected with fantasy novels, films, and gaming manuals readily available in library collections, and the games encourage higher order literacy skills and mental math. The games are social in nature and forge connections between players over shared interests, and also foster lasting bonds between young people and their libraries.

**Role Playing Games at the Library
Supplemental Material**

Social media and other promotional graphics for Virtual Library Con 2020









MY 3 MOODS



VEN OUT
APR 20

BEYOND

Character Sheet

NAME: _____

CLASS: _____

LEVEL: _____

HP: _____

AC: _____

SP: _____

SKILLS: _____

STATS: _____

ITEMS: _____

ACTIVITIES: _____

ADVENTURE LOG: _____

5th Edition - ACTION REFERENCE SHEET

MOVE ACTION
If your speed on your turn can be interrupted to perform any other action this sheet afterwards

ONE ACTION
Attack with a weapon or cast a spell

TWO-WEAPON FIGHTING
Always use your off-hand

HELP
Help another creature

CHAPTER III: THE MASTER OF THE KOBOLDS

Great hall

Inscriptions: The walls of this room are engraved with elvish poetry. A character that speaks elvish can translate it to common.

D&D
ADVENTURERS LEAGUE

HARRIED IN HILLSFAR:
A 5-session adventure perfect for beginners!

Thurs • Aug 2nd • 6 PM
Thurs • Aug 9th • 6 PM
Thurs • Aug 16th • 6 PM
Thurs • Aug 23rd • 6 PM
Thurs • Aug 30th • 10 AM

Registration opens July 2nd!

Character sheets provided, or bring your own!

Grades 6-12, all experience levels welcome!

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS®
@ VARINA AREA LIBRARY
TEEN DEPARTMENT

Henrico County Public Library
Varina Area Library
1875 New Market Rd
Henrico, VA 23231
(804) 501-1980

Connect With Us! Hqteenscome.org

Follow us on Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr, and Twitter.

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS®
ONE SHOT ADVENTURES

Monthly Saturdays
@ 2:30PM

May 14th
June 11th
July 9th

Bring your level 1 to 3 character sheets, or use one of ours!

Grades 6-12, all experience levels welcome!

VARINA AREA LIBRARY
TEEN DEPARTMENT

Henrico County Public Library

Are you ready?



D&D returns to
Fairfield Library

Wed. 2/15

These painted
adventurers
are ready to roll!







