

Ramping Up eBook Excitement

Feature

by Jane Farrell and Jennifer Hendry, November 2019

If you have been a library media specialist in a school within the last twenty years, you've had to face the eBook versus print dilemma. From the librarian's point of view, eBooks are a great solution for today's school libraries. Digital resources and eBooks:

- assist our struggling readers with text-to-speech, highlighting, and note-taking capabilities,
- provide easy access for anyone with a device, and school librarians are employing creative options to extend access to devices, such as by circulating e-readers loaded with selected titles
- are cost-effective because libraries can get multi-user licenses, along with many special deals through the publishers
- can be more up-to-date than print purchases, and some companies will give discounts when new editions are released
- can be read on all devices and don't need to be returned to the library!

Our priorities are always about fitting our collections to our students' needs, but what do we do when we, as librarians, know what may help students, but they tend to resist our suggestions? In our experience, eBooks are still not completely embraced by our students and teachers. Despite student excitement about using new apps and programs like Google, Kahoot, Twitter, Nearpod, etc., they don't want to use eBooks, because they want a "real" book. Teachers comment that they are "old school" and don't want to try eBooks.

eBooks represent big changes that make us rethink our practices as educators. Although I still prefer to hold a book in my hand, I am perplexed by the resistance of so many. In spite of, or perhaps because of, this tendency to resist eBooks, we need to make the shift for a variety of reasons. eBook collections make it possible to have more books while leaving physical space for collaboration and technology in our libraries. eBooks are budget friendly and require little processing. From a librarian's perspective, they are low maintenance. Whether you work in a district that has just moved to a one-student-one device environment or you have a limited number of device options, eBooks can help you expand your library collection and move your services into the classroom. With this rationale in mind, we believe that with a little promotion and creative use of eBook options, you can start to turn the tide toward more eBook use and enjoyment in your school.

Getting eBooks into Readers' Hands

Promotion of eBooks is tricky but necessary. In the same vein that we promote our print collections, we should be promoting our digital collections. eBooks are great, but if students don't know they are available they will become nothing more than a book collecting dust on a (virtual) shelf. Getting students involved and being consistent are my two favorite strategies. As one of my students said, "It's like a domino effect. If one kid likes eBooks and tells another and he tells another and so on, the next thing you know everybody knows about eBooks." Posting QR codes that link directly to the eBook in the library or near classrooms can help. Getting kids to make short videos to be shown at lunch or on the school's morning TV show can be powerful. Setting up a promotion table at lunch with an eBook scavenger hunt can draw in new customers. Be creative and student-centered and the word will get out.

Building Your Digital Collection

Wondering how to add eBooks to your collection? You have options! If you're willing or able to allocate a portion of your collection to eBooks, you can create a healthy, digital library for a small portion of your budget. There are plenty of choices from vendors. However, if eBooks just aren't in the budget, you can choose from a few free options. We listed some of our favorites in the sidebar.

Seventy percent of school libraries offer eBooks for curriculum support and classroom use ("Why eBooks?" 2017). You may also have access to eBooks, and not even know it! Sites such as Book Flix, True Flix, and Freedom Flix are full of great titles. Dig deep into the digital databases you subscribe to and you'll be surprised at the reading resources at your fingertips. Digital reading is not limited to books. Often, the articles found in our digital databases are the best options to keep students engaged and reading.

Using eBooks to Encourage Reading

Digital reading can provide you with opportunities to create interactive activities that encourage reading and keep your students engaged. Plan to teach a lesson on accessing eBooks into your curriculum early in the school year. This helps to create a virtual library that can be used in the classroom and at home. Teachers in my school love knowing that our students have options to read on devices. This not only builds the library collection but can also enhance classroom libraries. Here are some eBook

activities that have been hits at our schools.

Try a breakout

I have done a few digital breakouts using eBooks as my escape room. Part of my Capstone Interactive collection includes a series about the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C. I created digital museum breakouts using BreakoutEDU. Students were given a scenario of being locked in the museum after closing and instructed to breakout by unlocking the clues found in the eBooks. BreakoutEDU is a paid subscription site. If a subscription is out of your budget, consider using Google Forms or even a Word document to create a fun breakout. Paper and pencil is always an option!

Choose your own adventure

Why not create your own choose-your-own adventures with eBooks? Pick a great nonfiction story and use Google Forms to link different options for students to navigate through their reading. Try creating adventures on nonfiction topics such as surviving the desert or an earthquake. Take Bigfoot or the Yeti on an adventure! The options are endless.

Host a comedy club

Use QR codes to link to joke books. Students can use their devices to scan the QR code, open the eBook, find a good joke, and go to the "stage" to present their joke. I save this activity for the end of the year. It's a great way to have some fun when you're trying to fit a lesson in among all of the year-end activities that often disrupt the library schedule. This activity is always a student favorite and can often break the most reserved, quiet student out of their shell.

Embrace the Digital

Many of these same strategies can be used to share research databases and online encyclopedias, although those seem to be easier to promote through teacher collaboration. Once teachers realize how helpful the databases are to their students' learning needs, they will start to promote them for you. With many of the databases students can highlight articles, take notes, and save to their Google Drives. MLA citations are automatically placed in the articles with other formats available.

We used a Padlet at our spring 2019 Pennsylvania School Librarians Association concurrent session on digital resources to get our attendees involved in the conversation and solicit ideas on promoting eBooks. Check it out here: <https://padlet.com/hendryj/hib2nmnvhsfl>. One way or another, eBooks are here to stay. Embrace them by fitting them into your collection and curriculum in a way that suits your school culture.

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