

ZOMBIES IN YOUR LIBRARY

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Zombies have become increasingly popular in the past few years with the explosion of zombie-related works of fiction in film, on TV and in print. Teachers often use popular culture to create lessons which are engaging and exciting for their students and, occasionally, these lesson ideas require a little creative thinking from the librarian. What do you do, for example, when your middle school science teacher wants to do a research project on zombies? You certainly don't say no and discourage anyone who would like to use the library for research even as you wonder if he thinks there is a scientific base to zombie lore.

The science project was not to research zombies, but to create a plan for a zombie attack and to find the best location within our school campus to survive this attack. Working with the science teacher we were able to create a research component to his project. The students would research some necessary elements of disease, disease transmission and survival skills in order to have the necessary background knowledge before they began their survival plan. The United States Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has a website devoted to zombie preparedness. They believe using zombies is a non-threatening way to teach students emergency preparedness skills. I used this site for some of my preliminary research and ideas.

The plan was to create a series of research challenges for the students. The students would work with a partner to complete each challenge. As they correctly completed a challenge, each group would earn items for their survival pack. The more challenges completed in the 60-minute class, the better prepared they would be when creating their zombie shelter. They could earn: first aid kits, matches, batteries, flashlight, blanket, tarp, canned food, two litres of water, collapsible shovel, pocket knife and rope.

The challenges focused on different research skills and were presented as a large challenge card attached to an envelope. The cards on the front of the envelope introduced the challenge, and inside the envelope was the question and answer sheet. There was no order to the challenges. Some were quicker to complete than others and students could not move to the next challenge until they successfully completed

the first. The classroom teacher and I sat at the front of the room and evaluated responses, rewarding students with a try again or survival prize for the challenge.

There were five challenges, each focusing on the necessary information to complete the next part of their project, as well as different library skills. The first challenge was to introduce the students to the difference between isolation and quarantine. Using a page from the CDC website, the students were asked to answer a series of questions about isolation and large-scale quarantines in the U.S. They also were asked about the limitations of this site. The second challenge was to use a phone book to create a list of emergency contacts – fire, police, hospital and local power company. Students had to search the phone book to find these numbers. Although an old way to do this, it's a quick and easy lesson on indexes and alphabetization. The third challenge examined zombie myths. The challenge asked students to answer questions about zombie legends using World Book online. The fourth challenge developed some survival skills. Students were required to locate a specific book, and answer questions on cleaning water and signs a plant may be poisonous. The fifth and final challenge was to investigate the spread of disease. Using a map of the bubonic plague found in World Book online, students were required to answer some questions on the origin and spread of the disease.

The zombie research challenge was a highly engaging activity for the students. They were motivated to earn survival prizes and were interested in the information. The knowledge of disease spread and isolation helped them with their projects once they began in earnest. The challenges moved quickly, as most of the students were reviewing library skills, although the phone book proved to be the most difficult. Using games and challenges are fun and effective ways to introduce and reinforce library skills, especially when you need to research zombies in your library. ■

Bibliography
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