



Book Report

JULY 2021  VOLUME XXVIII

Summer Reading Flourishes with Community Partners

Johnson County Library's Summer Reading program kicked off June 5 and runs through July 31 with an emphasis on connecting the Library to the community and getting books to as many families as possible.

"The overall goal is to provide access to your local Library, to make sure kids remain engaged in reading at all levels," said Elementary Coordinating Librarian Melanie Fuemmeler, noting that families are trying to rebound from the pandemic.



Residents are able to select a free book at a Pop up in the Park.

"We want this to be a space where they feel refreshed and rejuvenated and where learning and reading continue to be fun and provide that high level of engagement."

The book distribution effort actually started in the spring when JCL reached out to school librarians in 80 Johnson County public schools.

"We wanted them to prioritize students who were reluctant readers," Fuemmeler explained. "We wanted to make sure they had a book in their hands before they left the schools."

Nearly every school responded, with nearly 7,500 books handed out.

Thousands more books are being distributed with the help of community partners, including parks and recreation agencies, non-profits, businesses and even doctors' offices.

Book distributions continue in a fun, safe way at summer Pop Up in the Park events, including July 24 in De Soto and July 30-31 in Mission.

This summer's theme is Tails and Tales, which is ripe for great stories about animals and nature's wonders. Johnson County librarians and youth information specialists are bringing the theme alive with book recommendations and local programming to help families discover new pleasures and treasures in reading.

The June 5 launch featured Kwame Alexander, a Newbery Medalist and best-selling author and educator, who shared his high energy and passion for poetry and stories via Facebook Live.

"I'm glad to talk about the beauty of summer reading," Alexander told his Johnson County Library audience. "We've got to get out and get back into the world. What better way to get into the world and find out what's happening than by reading, than by uncovering the treasures between the pages of a book?"

Alexander's own works are highly recommended, including "Acoustic Rooster and his Barnyard Band," "Surf's Up," "The Crossover," and "The Undeclared."

Another key recommendation is "Bicycling with Butterflies," by Kansas field biologist Sara Dykman. The Corinth Library community garden will be Exhibit A, as staffers work to make it a butterfly pollinator garden.

Most programming this summer is virtual, with new presenters every week, allowing for significant outreach to families that may not usually experience Libraries in person.

Programming includes online storytimes; tween and teen book clubs; virtual tours of the Topeka Zoo and the Clearwater, Fla., aquarium; and art classes from Charlie Mylie and Young Rembrandts. Contests in bookmark and sticker design, photography and short-story writing give patrons a chance to flex their artistic and literary muscles.

Summer is a very busy time for Fuemmeler and the youth information specialists, but they relish the chance to reinforce how important libraries are in continuing learning and enrichment.

"It says our Library services are very relevant and people want to be connected to their local Library," Fuemmeler said. "It also tells us there is a strong need to think about access points to books. Traditionally our branches have been overwhelmed with demand for books. People flood in. This is helping us to think about other ways to get books into the hands of kids."



Johnson County Library staff handed out books at their first Pop Up in the Park in June.

WHAT'S INSIDE

- 2 **Branching Out:** Patrons Embrace Drive-Thru Branch Service
- 2 **Top 10 Holds:** June 2021
- 3 **Patron Spotlight:** Patron Finds Library to be a Temple for Learning
- 4 **Staff Spotlight:** Early Literacy Coordinator Cherishes Library's Youngest Patrons
- 5 **Event Spotlight:** Summer Reading's Awesome Launch with Kwame Alexander; Horror Fiction Thrives Even Amid Pandemic
- 6 **Taking a Closer Look:** Social Media Highlights
- 7 **Month in Review:** June 2021

BRANCHING OUT

Patrons Embrace Drive-Thru Branch Service

Just as banks and restaurants have found drive-thru service to be a customer-friendly amenity, Johnson County Library has realized it's a big benefit for patrons -- and never more so than during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Blue Valley branch has had a drive-thru window for years. As new branches have opened, including Monticello in 2018 and Lenexa City Center in 2019, they have also provided that service.

Interestingly, not only did usage skyrocket during the pandemic closure, but usage has remained strong as buildings reopened.



Clerk Marcia Dunn assists patrons at the Monticello drive-thru.



TOP HOLDS



JUNE 2021

- **The Last Thing He Told Me** - Laura Dave
- **Malibu Rising** - Taylor Jenkins Reid
- **People We Meet on Vacation** - Emily Henry
- **Golden Girl** - Elin Hilderbrand
- **The Midnight Library** - Matt Haig
- **That Summer** - Jennifer Weiner
- **Sooley** - John Grisham
- **The Maidens** - Alex Michaelides
- **The Plot** - Jean Hanff Korelitz
- **The Premonition: A Pandemic Story** - Michael Lewis

Branch	Checkouts Jan-March	Checkouts June-August	Increase Percentage
Blue Valley	20,172	49,998	148%
Monticello	9,261	30,235	226%
Lenexa	10,866	28,982	166%

Branch	Patron Visits Jan-March	Patron Visits June-August	Increase Percentage
Blue Valley	7,236	15,336	112%
Monticello	3,551	9,959	180%
Lenexa	4,155	11,248	171%

Kristen Holdman-Ross, assistant branch manager at Lenexa City Center, has collected data from the three branches that dramatically illustrates the drive-thru popularity over time.

"It's really the convenience factor," explains Matt Hammes, assistant branch manager at Blue Valley. "People are aiming to quickly get things that they are specifically requesting, and they were able to do that in a safe way during the pandemic."

After the pandemic shut everything down in late March 2020, the drive-thrus at Blue Valley, Lenexa and Monticello were the first services to reopen, in late May 2020. Blue Valley in particular was slammed with hundreds of cars snaking through its property. Hammes praises the Facilities staff for providing good signage and helping to direct that traffic.

Once the branches reopened for limited service in mid-June 2020, the drive-thru crush ended, but demand remained strong.

"We have a lot of patrons, vulnerable populations, people with older family members, kids, that kind of thing, who have really been appreciative of the drive-thru services," Hammes said. "They can still get materials, get whatever they need, without having to risk coming into the building."

Drive-thru usage at all three branches is generally pretty steady throughout

the day. Peak demand is consistently from 3-5 p.m., after school and work, averaging three items per transaction.

"Lenexa has one of the few stand-alone Library drive-thru services in the country. It's located in an adjacent parking garage, and that's worked out well," Holdman-Ross said.

"It's a unique opportunity for our clerks to build relationships with the patrons," she said. "There's kind of a connection that happens when they work the drive-thru and see those same faces over and over."

Michelle Holden, assistant branch manager at Monticello, recalled that when Monticello had a climate-control problem recently, patrons were still able to use the drive-thru while the building was briefly closed.

Clerks enjoy working the drive-thru window. "It helps to break up a lot of the other things that they do throughout the day," Holden said.

Drive-thru service is so worthwhile that it's being incorporated into upcoming projects. Central Resource Library will have a new east side drive-thru window when its renovation is done late this year. And plans for a new Merriam branch as part of the Merriam Community Center campus also call for drive-thru service. That new Library branch is currently slated for completion in 2023.

PATRON OF THE MONTH

Patron Finds Library to be a Temple for Learning

When Neeharika Buddha was 21 and newly wed in 2008, she moved from her home in south India to Overland Park, where her new husband was building his career as a software engineer.

She knew almost no one and was living halfway across the world from her homeland. But a cousin living in Dallas told her to seek out the nearest library as a worthwhile community resource. She got a library card at the Blue Valley branch, which fortunately was located close to her apartment.

“Initially it was a little overwhelming for me, but Johnson County Library was the best place for me at that time. Just to familiarize with the people and the culture,” Buddha recalled. “It was, to me, like a temple.”

She found the librarians friendly and welcoming and was amazed at the collection of books available to check out. She loved to browse the stacks and read nonfiction works to increase her knowledge of the area and on a variety of topics. Then she took some art classes in Johnson County and found books related to art.

As a child, she had considered herself a “reluctant reader.” But after moving to Johnson County and finding time on her hands, she discovered the joy of reading for both education and enrichment.

In the ensuing 13 years, Buddha and her husband, Kalyana Kotipalli, have built a good life for themselves in south Overland Park. They have two daughters: Amulya, age 10, and Aadhya, age 4, and Buddha now works in information technology at Garmin.

Along the way, she has continued to be an avid patron of Johnson County Library services, seeking out books and programs for herself and her daughters.



Patron Neeharika Buddha enjoys Book Group conversations.

Last summer, Buddha recalls, Aadhya really enjoyed virtual Storytimes at 10 a.m. and Amulya benefitted from the Young Rembrandts art classes.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Buddha also discovered the virtual book groups, which she found to be a great source of information and conversation. She and Amulya participated together in the Community Matters Family Book Group. Buddha was also in an adult book group and Amulya was in a tween book group for children ages 9-12.

Buddha says Amulya had been a reluctant reader, but the tween book group helped motivate her to become a voracious reader because she knew she had to finish the books to contribute to the discussion.

Buddha didn't want her daughter to become addicted to screens and videos during the pandemic and says the book groups were a good alternative.

“This saved her,” Buddha observed. “A major chunk of her time was with her books.”

Buddha also really enjoyed the Community Matters family book discussions, which opened her eyes to different cultures and perspectives.

In the adult book group, Buddha learned a lot from “The Book of Last Names,” by Kristin Harmel; “The Vanishing Half,” by Brit Bennett; and “The Big Finish,” by Brooke Fossey. She appreciated the book group's collective wisdom.

“I look forward to what I can learn from others,” she said. “That was really nice.”

As the country emerges from the pandemic, Buddha says she will continue to see the Library as a vital amenity for herself and her family.

“It's so useful to the community as a whole,” she said. “It's a very good habit that children can pick up, reading books and improving their knowledge.”

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

Early Literacy Coordinator Cherishes Library's Youngest Patrons

As an information specialist, Shannon Goebel loved hosting in-person Storytimes and found her greatest joy working with the youngest learners at Lackman and then at Lenexa City Center. When Early Literacy Coordinating Librarian Bradley Debrick retired in late 2019, she considered applying for the job as her next career step.

But then the pandemic hit and the position was frozen. During most of 2020, Goebel served on an early literacy team and also on the online programming and events planning team.

Those initiatives gave her additional experience and confidence to apply when the early literacy librarian position opened again in late 2020. She got the job and started in February of this year.

"I coordinate the programming, outreach and system-wide initiatives for the early literacy aged group, birth to age 6," she explained. "The foundation is the 6 by 6 Ready to Read program. The whole system works to put the 6 by 6 program into action."



Shannon Goebel, early literacy coordinator.

She brings key skills and strengths to the role. Before obtaining a master's degree in library and information studies, she majored in business administration in college. She really enjoys creating, administering and coordinating systems. She's methodical, organized and calm under pressure.

She says she benefits from an excellent team of more than 20 youth information specialists who are passionate, innovative and work well together. Everyone's goal is to give children the skills they need to learn to read by their 6th birthday.

"The early literacy side of things already has a very strong foundation," she said, "but I get to work with staff and help coordinate so we can continue to grow and adapt along with that foundation."

Her priorities include equity, diversity and sustainability.

Many children engage with the Library alongside a parent or caregiver. But Goebel is mindful that lots of kids don't have those opportunities. So, the outreach to preschools, daycare centers and Head Start is important.

"We've been finding unique ways to connect with patrons," she said, citing early literacy kits provided for partner agencies.

"A lot of the outreach is we try really hard to meet the underserved population," she said. "Those are the kids who

don't get to come to the Library, so we bring the Library to them."

One of her priorities is to continue engagement with those outside agencies, to adapt the early literacy program as the community changes.

Providing diverse books, materials and programming is also a priority.

Before the pandemic, in-person Storytimes were huge draws. In 2020, virtual Storytimes became a new way to connect, and the Library provided Storytime bags for over 300 families to pick up at the branches.

In-person Storytimes will definitely resume when it is safe, but online Storytimes will likely continue as an alternative for those without easy access to the branches. So Goebel is focused on creating a sustainable schedule of both online and in-person offerings that works for staff and the public.

"We'll be evaluating the best balance for the whole system," she said.

When she contemplates the future, of course she sees challenges ahead. But Goebel is optimistic.

"As we look to returning to more in-person services, I'm really looking forward to how we're going to grow and change and adapt to serve those youngest patrons of Johnson County," she said, "and working with amazing staff to achieve that."

EVENTS SPOTLIGHT

Summer Reading's Awesome Launch with Kwame Alexander

Kwame Alexander is a master craftsman, and words are his building blocks. With his artistry and exuberant writing, the internationally-renowned author and educator creates poems and stories to delight readers of all ages.



Author/Poet Kwame Alexander launches Summer Reading.

That's why Alexander was the ideal host to launch Johnson County Library's 2021 Summer Reading program. His June 5 Facebook Live appearance featured Alexander's boundless

energy to get young people and their parents in gear for a summer immersed in great books.

He began with his work, "How to Read a Book," an exquisite description of the reader's journey: "A picnic of words and sounds, in leaps and bounds, so get real cozy between the covers and let your fingers wonder as they wander, squeeze every morsel of each plump line until the last drop of magic drips from the infinite sky."

This year's theme is Tails and Tales, with animals a big focus. Alexander shared how he was inspired to write "Acoustic Rooster and His Barnyard Band," featuring animals based on real musicians, after he got his 1-year-old daughter to stop crying by playing jazz music.

Alexander loves "coming up with cool words and making them dance together on the page." Then, he seeks the ideal illustrator whose pictures leap off the page.

Alexander encouraged teachers to help students discover their own favorite books.

"I would remind teachers that books are amusement parks, and that kids need to be able to choose the rides," he said.

His heartfelt advice: Seize all that life has to offer.

"Say yes to opportunities," he urged his audience. "Walk through doors, even when you don't know what's on the other side. I think when we say yes to life, so many doors can open for us and so many wonderful things can happen."

Horror Fiction Thrives Even Amid Pandemic

You might think that during a deadly global pandemic, readers would escape to fluff and romance and shy away from stories that frighten, shock, disgust or fuel emotions of dread or suspense.

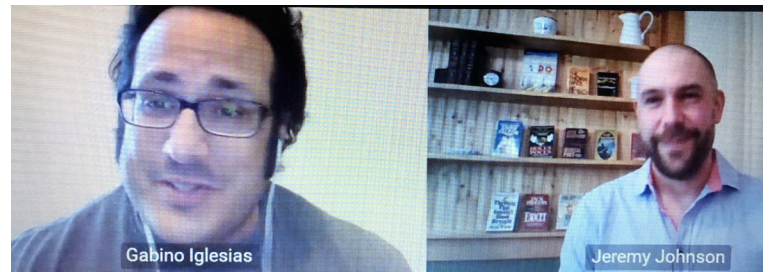
But actually, horror fiction is thriving with recent best-sellers like "The Only Good Indians," by Stephen Graham Jones, and "Mexican Gothic," by Silvia Moreno-Garcia.

On June 15, a Johnson County audience tuned in for a fascinating conversation with acclaimed writers Gabino Iglesias (author of "Coyote Songs") and Jeremy Robert Johnson (author of "The

Loop"). They discussed what it means to read and write horror fiction in horrible times.

"The Loop" was written several years ago but published in 2020. It features a mysterious illness outbreak, quarantine, class-based tension and propaganda control. Johnson said he didn't realize how prescient the book would be.

"It was interesting to hear people say that when they did engage with it, that it was cathartic," Johnson noted. "That seeing these things that were almost worse than what was happening, that it helped them process things."



Authors Gabino Iglesias and Jeremy Robert Johnson discuss the rich genre of horror fiction.

Iglesias said horror fiction can be superbly written and he really engages with books by authors like Stephen Graham Jones and Brian Evenson.

"I'm rarely scared when I'm reading a horror book," he said. "It doesn't cause me any fear on the page but it makes me feel unsettled. I like that little bit of discomfort."

He said he also finds books by authors like Edward Lee to be enormously entertaining.

Johnson said horror fiction, which encompasses everything from crime to monsters and zombies, booms in periods of social unrest because it's a metaphor that helps readers deal with real-life trauma and stress. And, sometimes, the good guys win.

TAKING A CLOSER LOOK

Social Media Highlights

As you can see by the posts below, the Johnson County Library system continues to thrive even in these difficult times! Thank you for your support! *Click the captions to view full posts online!*



Johnson County Library
@jocolibrary




A kid walk into a library and asks the librarian for a book on turtles.
Librarian replies, "Hard back?"
The kid, "Yea, with little heads."

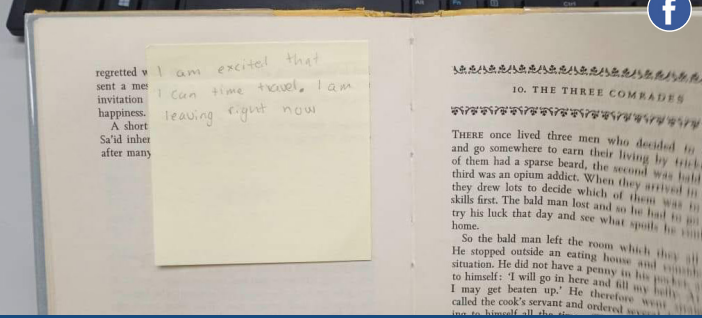
Share your favorite #libraryjoke with us

2:28 PM · Jun 21, 2021 · Twitter Web App

6 Retweets 1 Quote Tweet 39 Likes

Patrons shared their favorite library jokes and reached more than 5,800 people on Twitter.






More than 5,800 patrons were reached by one time traveling reader.



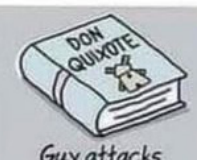
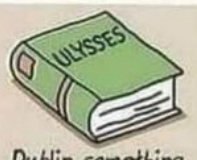

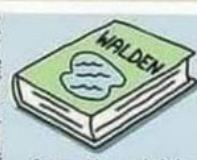


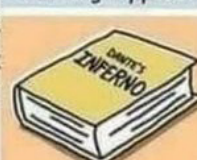




The Johnson County Teen Task force chalked the walk for Mental Health Awareness.



abridged classics

 <p>Everyone is sad. It snows.</p>	 <p>Farming sucks. Road trip! Road trip sucks.</p>	 <p>Guy attacks windmills. Also, he's mad.</p>
 <p>Lost generation gets drunk. They're still lost.</p>	 <p>Man vs. whale. Whale wins.</p>	 <p>Dublin, something, something, something, run-on sentence.</p>
 <p>War veteran takes forever to get home then kills everyone.</p>	 <p>A sort-of brother and sister fall in love. It's foggy.</p>	 <p>Man sits outside for two years. Nothing happens.</p>
 <p>Murderer feels bad. Confesses. Goes to jail. Feels better.</p>	 <p>Hero kills monster. Blah, blah, blah, blah. Dragon kills Hero.</p>	 <p>All hell breaks loose.</p>

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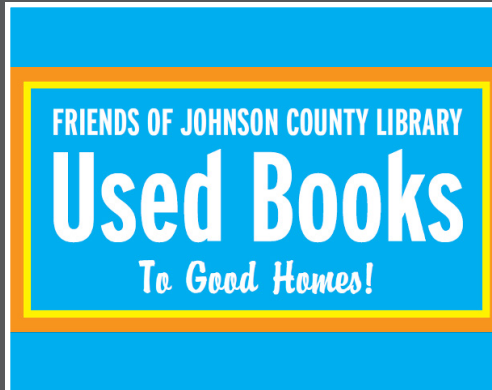
More than 15,500 enjoyed reading abridged classics on Facebook.



Month in Review June 2021



Around 375 patrons attended Tales and Tails themed activities on June 5 to celebrate the launch of Summer Reading.



Friends of Johnson County Library paused this year's Sizzlin Summer Booksale, but you can still purchase items in stores or online at friendsofjcl.org.



Corinth's Herb Garden, created by librarians Diana Spencer and Meagan Condon, is featured in several of this year's Summer Reading Programs.



Cedar Roe Library reopened June 21 after the completion of a critical upgrade to the building's HVAC system, as well as other exciting improvements.







Shawnee Library closed June 22 for plumbing repairs to a main sanitary waste line. The building reopened June 23.



Ballot boxes return to six library locations to support of the Aug. 3 Primary Elections.

NEXT ISSUE



-  **Cover Story:** Transition Team works on In-Person Programming
-  **Branching Out:** Providing Youth Services to multiple branches
-  **Patron Of The Month:** Prairie Village family appreciates book clubs, online programs
-  **Staff Spotlight:** Meet Adriana Escudero, clerk and ELL helper

JOHNSON COUNTY
KANSAS
Library

BOOK REPORT

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