



Resources to Help You Grow Your Library

Book Ideas That Don't Cost a Dime

Following is a list of ideas that don't cost a single penny and can help you grow your classroom book collection immediately. These ideas will show you ways to stretch your thinking before you stretch your resources.

Idea	Description
Go on a book hunt in your own classroom.	Check out the cupboards, closets, shelves, and dark corners of your classroom. If books are hidden away there, consider bringing them out to become part of your classroom collection. For every book you consider leaving behind in that "safe place," ask yourself this question: "When will this book next be read if it stays here?" Then ask yourself, "How much more could it be read if kids could see it and get their hands on it?"
Break up whole-class book sets.	Yes, there, I said it. Break up whole-class book sets. Whole-class teaching of an assigned book or novel is contrary to the strong research base for what motivates and engages your readers. Everyone isn't ever going to be ready for and interested in that set at the same time. So, instead of keeping the set together, break it up into smaller sets and individual books that can be shared with other classrooms. When everyone in the school decides to do this, you will be amazed at how many books you can share with each other. If everyone else in the school isn't ready, be a trendsetter and pay it forward. Tell them you are working on increasing book selection for independent reading in your classroom and thought of them. Ask them to keep you in mind if they ever consider doing the same.
Tell families what you are doing and ask for their help.	When you tell families about your efforts to build strong and diverse book collections in every classroom, you will be amazed at the support they will give you. The first thing you can ask them to do is to scour their own bookshelves at home for any books that their children have outgrown or are no longer reading. You can also ask parents to consider supporting your efforts with gift cards to the local bookstore or books purchased from monthly book orders. Check out the sample letter to parents provided later in this appendix.
Ask for the gift that keeps on giving.	Instead of holiday gifts to other students or the teacher, ask families to consider giving "the gift that keeps on giving" by contributing one or more books to the classroom collection at holiday time. You'll put a special bookplate in the front cover of each of these books, commemorating the name of the child and the date of the donation for all time. Some classrooms ask families to consider commemorating birthdays or other special days by contributing a book the child loves to the classroom collection. On the child's birthday, the teacher reads that book aloud, and everyone in the class creates a special card for the child, somehow incorporating an element of the book.

Ask grandparents to sponsor a magazine subscription.	Many grandparents are eager to support learning in whatever way they can. Make a special invitation to grandparents or other important people in a child's life to sponsor a magazine subscription for your classroom. When the magazines start rolling in, they will become a great and lasting complement to your nonfiction library.
Set up a book exchange area in your staff room.	Let's face it. Sometimes teachers can be packrats; we have a hard time throwing away anything, especially books! We're frugal human beings because resources are always so short in schools. So, to capitalize on this, you can set up an area in your school for books that are no longer being used by one teacher to be potentially adopted by another classroom. You may be asking yourself, "If my colleague no longer wants the book, why would I?" However, once you start this process, you will be amazed at how true the old adage "One person's trash is another person's treasure" turns out to be.
Organize an annual book fair at your school.	Book fairs are fund-raisers with a reading twist. Although you probably won't make tons of money, you can earn lots of books. You will also get more books into your students' homes, which is another important way to support reading growth. A by-product of more books in the home may also turn out to be more outgrown books coming back to school to be donated. When you do a book fair, be sure to have every classroom design a wish list for families to see when they come to shop. Many families are happy to purchase an extra book or two to be donated to the classroom collection, especially if it will have a bookplate bearing their child's name and the date of the donation.
Make the most of book order promotions.	Be sure to keep a constant eye on the book order points and promotions that you receive as a way to keep a steady stream of new books coming into your classroom. Also, rather than just hand out the book order to your students, take time to promote some of the best books in it each time. This will potentially increase the number of quality books (versus other junk) that your students order. You can also use the book orders to learn about what's new, what's popular, and what your kids are interested in.
Visit service organizations.	Service organizations love to support a good cause. Increasing reading by increasing access to great choices within the classroom is a great cause to pitch to your local Lions, Rotary, Jaycees, Kiwanis, and other clubs. If you really want to make an impact, consider taking a few students with you to the meeting when you make your pitch. Alternatively, you could make a video of your students to take along with you.
Consider using DonorsChoose.org and other simple charitable grants to purchase books.	DonorsChoose.org is an online charity that matches the needs of public school teachers across the country with donors. Donors can give any amount to the project that most inspires them. Although teachers can request funding for any project amount over \$100, projects less than \$400 stand the best chance of being funded. Creative teachers have broken their funding requests into smaller projects or categories (nonfiction, below-level readers, mysteries, favorite series, etc.).

Give your kids as much access to the school library as possible.	Your kids need more access to books starting immediately. So, if your classroom library is currently pretty lean, do whatever you can to get your kids more access to the library in their school right now. This might mean pushing for the checkout limit to be extended (maybe five books at a time instead of one or two), or it might mean you push for more access (unlimited visits each week before and after school or during recess) rather than just one scheduled visit per week with the class, or you may push for more opportunities to take your whole class to the library each week as a group.
Visit the public library.	If you can get your students to the public library, great. But even if you can't, get there yourself and check out as many books as you are able to so you can supplement your classroom collection. Although you may not be able to let these books go home with your students, you are sure to brighten their in-school independent reading options with help from the public library.
Ask for library discards.	Be sure to let both your school and your public library know that you are open to receiving any and all discards of children's books that they have. Libraries discard books for a variety of reasons. Many of them are just beaten up. Some are not worth putting out for children, however, and you will have to be discerning. You may be pleasantly surprised, though, at what some libraries pull from circulation for replacement.
Take yet another look around your classroom or school.	The reality is that there are hundreds, if not thousands, of books in most schools that go unread each year because they are not accessible to children. Sometimes we work so hard to protect books for one reason or another that we forget the reason they exist, which is to be read by our students.
Spend time teaching and insisting upon responsible and respectful treatment of books.	This strategy not only extends the life of our current collections but eases our anxiety about giving kids access to new books. Occasionally, there are valid reasons to preserve or protect certain texts. But in many schools, there are just way too many books with some sort of barrier preventing them from getting into the hands of kids. When we teach and insist upon the responsible and respectful treatment of books, our kids will step up to the challenge and therefore alleviate some our fear and need to be so protective of the books we have.
Start a "Free the Books" campaign in your school.	Yes, books experience more wear and tear and stress and risk when they are in the hands of kids than they do when they are tucked neatly away in a cupboard. It's true. But in the cupboard (or box, or dusty stack, or top shelf, or locked library) they are not living the life they were meant to live. A book is born to be read and reread and read again by another. A book is not born to wait. Books are impatient and needy things, wanting to be held, studied, admired, read, bragged about, and shared. Commit today to "free the books" in your school.

Sample Parent Letter to Support a Book Hunt

Parents,

We're going on a book hunt and we hope you can help!

Our goal?

To give our students more access to books than ever before by collecting at least _____ high-quality books for each classroom collection.

How can you help?

Go through your book collection at home and consider handing down any gently used books that your kids have outgrown.

What kind of books are we looking for?

All kinds. All levels. All interest areas. Fiction, nonfiction, mysteries, picture books, fact books, chapter books, beginning readers, humorous books, series, alphabet books. If the book is in good shape and is one you think kids would want to read again, it fits the bill!

What about at-home reading?

We want you to consider only those books that your kids no longer read at home. Having access to books at home is equally important, so please don't short your own collection.

What if you don't have any books to share?

No problem. Not everyone will. But you can still help spread the word. Maybe your neighbors, relatives, or coworkers have kids' books on their shelves that are no longer being used. Ask around. Every book helps.

What should you do with the books you want to share?

Your school will have a central drop box in the front entry in the coming month. Just send the books to school with your student or drop them off yourself. If you have many boxes of books and need help transporting them, please call the school and we'll arrange for a pickup.

What if the books are for a different age group than your child's current grade?

For most families, this will be true. Since our school is working to build our book collections for all grades, we will collect the books in a central location and distribute to classrooms and grades that are good matches.

Thanks for helping equip our school with books, books, books!

Sincerely,

Book Ideas That Cost Next to Nothing

The ideas in this section are very low-cost ideas for teachers and schools on a tight budget. They're a bit like rubbing two coins together and having a book appear. They cost a *little*, but they *don't* cost a lot.

Idea	Description
Check out rummage sales.	Rummage sales are an amazing source of inexpensive books. When I go to rummage sales, I always check out the kids' books. If they are asking more than you want to pay, show up close to closing time and offer one price for all the books you are interested in. The seller will almost always take you up on this, especially if you tell him or her the books will be going to a classroom. Rummage sales are a bit like casinos. Sometimes you come up short, but when you hit a jackpot (good books at a cheap price), it keeps you coming back. If you don't like going to rummage sales yourself, chances are you have friends or relatives who do. Tell them what you're looking for and give them a twenty-dollar bill in advance. I'll bet you money the bill turns into lots of books. Rummagers love to have a mission!
Visit used book stores and thrift stores.	Used book stores and thrift stores are similar to rummage sales, but you might pay a little bit more. The advantage is you can go to a used book store looking for a certain series or author and have a higher success rate. Many used book stores and thrift stores also have certain days of the week when they run sales or promotions like two for the price of one or everything you can fit in a bag for one price. So ask about these.
Collect unwanted books and trade them in at a used book store.	When you discover some books that are not suitable for your library for some reason, fill a box and take it in to your local used book store to get credit. This credit can usually be used to trade for other books at little or no additional expense.
Search eBay, Craigslist, or other websites where people sell used books.	If you know your way around an online auction, it can be a great place to get some used trade books. Just search for favorite series, authors, or genres, or try more general terms like "children's book collection" or "leveled book sets." You'll be amazed how many people are peddling books.
Search for vendors with special offers.	<p>Although many leveled books created for the early years cost upwards of six dollars, even when purchased in packs of six, there are a number of vendors that sell quality books for one dollar or less. Check out the following books for a buck (or less):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Townsend Press' King School series (www.townsendpress.com/our-books/the-king-school-series): Individual books in this series cost one dollar. ✦ Candlewick Press' Brand New Readers: Buy them on Amazon and get boxed sets of ten or more for less than ten dollars. ✦ Scholastic Reading Club: Sort by price, and you'll find there are almost always seasonal and other books on sale for one dollar or less. ✦ Literacy Empowerment Foundation (LEF; http://lefbooks.org): This organization has several programs to help provide inexpensive books to teachers.

Book Ideas That Help You Get the Biggest Bang for Your Buck

Eventually you'll need to purchase some full-price books. This section provides ideas on how to invest wisely and get high-quality books at the best possible price.

Idea	Description
Get books in the budget and keep them there.	Every classroom or grade level needs to have a budget line item dedicated to book purchases every year. Classroom book collections need to continually grow and evolve. Visit with your building principal about getting a line item in the budget to support regular spending on classroom libraries. Reading teachers need books and lots of them.
Purchase collections as a set.	<p>Many vendors are equipped to sell you an entire classroom collection or a targeted classroom collection in one shot. If you have the resources to do this, it saves a lot of time and energy; you don't need to design and order your own collection one vendor at a time. Here are some sellers that I have worked with and would recommend:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Booksource (www.booksource.com) ✦ Custom Education Solutions (www.customedu.com) ✦ Developmental Studies Center (www.devstu.org/individualized-daily-reading) ✦ Scholastic (http://teacher.scholastic.com/products/classroombooks/readytogo.htm)
Keep a running list of books you want and need.	When you learn that you have some dollars to spend on your classroom book collection (or an unexpected donor or opportunity), you will not want to be caught short on ideas of what to buy. This appendix includes a tool called "Taking Stock of Your Book Collection" to help you figure out what you have and what you need more of. It also has a list of dozens of websites that contain book recommendations for young children.
Purchase add-on packs.	Almost every vendor that sells leveled books also sells what is called an add-on pack. This is a package of one copy of each of the individual titles in a text range or other segment of the collection. The books are typically intended to extend the size of or replace lost books from guided reading six-packs. However, since they include one copy only of a variety of titles within a level or series, they are also perfect for classroom collections, where only one copy is needed. This is a cheaper way to buy the titles from most vendors than purchasing them individually.
Purchase six-packs and break them up between classrooms.	A similar strategy to the previous one is to take advantage of the six-pack pricing most vendors offer and break up the six-packs between four to six classrooms.

continues

Always ask for discounts and free shipping.	When ordering from any vendor, always try to speak directly to a sales representative. This is different from customer service. Sales representatives want to make sales. So never be scared to ask what type of a discount they can offer you. You might be surprised to learn that you can get up to 40 percent off at times just for asking, depending on the size of your purchase. If you can't get an on-the-spot discount from the sales rep, be sure to ask if she or he anticipates any sales promotions in the near future. Because shipping is expensive, be sure to ask for or look for free shipping options. Online book vendors like Amazon often offer free shipping on their slower shipping speeds.
Spend time in book stores and buy books you love.	Buying books we love and rushing back to the classroom to share them with our students is a great way to grow readers. If you have asked for (and received) gift cards to book stores from parents and other classroom supporters, this expense won't have to come right out of your own pocket.
Use lists from the experts to guide you.	Teachers College Reading and Writing Project keeps comprehensive and updated book lists to support all grades and genres. To see these lists, visit the section of the TCRWP site called "Book Lists and Classroom Libraries" (http://readingandwritingproject.org/resources/book-lists). The Horn Book site provides dozens of lists of the best children's books, in a variety of categories (http://archive.hbook.com/resources/books).

Taking Stock of the Classroom Library

	1. Yes! I'm in great shape.	2. I'm not quite there yet, but I'm on my way.	3. No. Not even close.	Notes
I have sturdy, accessible shelving in my room that works well with baskets and provides adequate space for a growing collection.				
I have access to baskets of appropriate sizes and shapes for my shelves and the books in my collection.				
The book collection is inviting and well organized .				
The book collection is located in an area of the classroom that makes it easily accessible to individuals or small groups of students.				
I have a robust collection of leveled books that represent the span of my grade level, the grade above, the grade below, and any other levels the readers in my room need.				
I have a robust collection of fiction books in good condition. They are well written, appealing, and appropriate for the age level.				
I have identified multiple fiction categories to sort my collection into, including genres, favorite authors, favorite series, seasonal stories, and themes.				
I have a robust collection of nonfiction books in good condition that are well written, appealing, and appropriate for the age level.				
I have identified multiple nonfiction categories to sort my collection into, including biography, autobiography, high-interest informational topics, and topics related to grade-level social studies and science themes.				
I have a robust collection of other books in good condition that are well written, appealing, and appropriate for the age level.				
I have identified other categories I will use to sort my collection, including poetry, anthologies, and magazines.				
Baskets are clearly labeled , indicating the genre, topic, level, or other category.				
Books are clearly labeled , indicating whom they belong to and which basket they should be returned to.				

Reflection on Building a Better Book Collection

1. Which of these actions do you think is most important for your students?

- * Increase the number of books in the collection.
- * Increase the variety of books in the collection.
- * Increase the quality of the books in the collection.
- * Clear out the duds so kids are more likely to encounter the good stuff.
- * Give kids more access to books that have been out of sight or out of reach.
- * Start exploring outside resources.
- * Start asking others to help you with your book search.

2. Appendix A is filled with strategies for getting more books in the hands of your kids.

- * Which of the strategies do you think would yield the *most* books with the least effort? What time line can you commit to for utilizing this strategy?
- * Which of the strategies do you think would yield the *best* books? What time line can you commit to for utilizing this strategy?
- * Which of the strategies do you think is the scariest? Why do you think so? What could you do to overcome your worries?
- * Which of the strategies are so simple you could begin using them today?

3. Use the following table to keep an ongoing list of actions for growing your library.

Keeping My Library Growing

Priorities for My Library	Actions/Resources to Consider