



FROM THE LIBRARY

Suzanne **Sherman**

The Bookmobile + SSR = A Reading Safe Space in the Classroom

Through intentional and ongoing collaboration, cultivated relationships, detailed collection development, and a strong working knowledge of classroom curriculum and instruction, school librarians *can* and *should* serve as a vital part of engaging young adult readers. When school librarians are connected to the needs of classroom teachers, the benefits that can come from collaboration are powerful. In my 13 years of experience as a school librarian, I have found the easiest entry point into this collaboration is through Silent Sustained Reading (SSR) programs that teachers (usually, but not limited to, English/language arts teachers) implement in their classrooms. I have witnessed firsthand that when these programs follow

research-backed methods for success—allowing students to self-select their texts; consistent teacher modeling of reading for pleasure—genuine engagement happens.

One way that I work with teachers to facilitate the SSR program is to bring my Bookmobile into classrooms so that I can share not only my high-interest, carefully curated collection of books, but also ideas for how to find the right book.

Collaborating with teachers beforehand to better learn about students' perceived reading levels and reading

interests makes these visits all the more meaningful. Once in the classroom, I find that being honest and straightforward with my high schoolers is the best way to provide a space of trust and often share with them my own excuses for not reading more. I often sympathize with students over the demands on our time or our inability to disconnect fully from technology. But I am sure to remind students that SSR is a time and space that has been carved out for them by their teachers to slow down their busy lives and *just enjoy reading*. Sometimes this space can feel less threatening than the school library, which houses thousands of books (a dream come true for book lovers, but a nightmare for someone who finds the whole process of finding a book to read too much to handle!). I remind them that my Bookmobile is a safe space, too, and we often end up sharing favorite titles with each other and recommending books to one another. We bond over selections as I check the books out right there in the classroom.

For me, the connections I make with the students and the teachers are what drive me and what keep me committed to helping students grow in their desire to read. I see every invitation to work with teachers as an opportunity to connect students to books that they enjoy and to characters that become a part of their lives—and that, ultimately, may lead to them become lifelong readers who trust the guidance of a librarian!

Suzanne Sherman is a former English and Spanish teacher turned librarian! She has been a school librarian for 14 years and is going on her 12th year at Hardin Valley

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Academy, a public high school in Knox County, TN. Her transition from a classroom containing 30 some students to one that encompasses close to 2,000 began when she realized that the very best part of her day was when she got the right book to the right student, at the right time, and that she could do that on a larger scale. Suzanne loves reading both children's and young adult books and

having big conversations with students, as well as helping them navigate the ever-shifting world of technology and digital citizenship. She also thrives on collaborating with teachers and developing lessons with them that drive students toward inquiry. In addition to her role as a school librarian, Suzanne also teaches for the School of Information Sciences at UT Knoxville.