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The Pirate Underground

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The Pirate Underground

by Peggy Christensen



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How do you find an activity for students who feel like they have no place to belong and no one to champion their needs? The answer to that for the Marshfield High School Library was to start an after school program that would allow students to pursue their own interests and collaborate on their own terms.

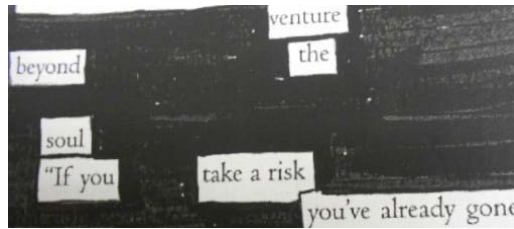
The idea of creating opportunities for students to use the library beyond the school day had been brewing in my mind for several years. The barriers that kept popping up were the usual ones: finding the money, time, and personnel. Plus, transportation issues always seemed to stop forward progress. But then a pathway opened.

A young intern teacher, Jeff Van Vickle, came to our school. He was a little unconventional, full of ideas, and had a strong desire to get involved. I approached him about my idea to create a space for kids who always seemed to be on the fringes because they were not “joiners” and asked him if he would like to work with me to get something started. He did.

The concept for the program was rather idealistic in the beginning, but then we boiled it down to some practical baby steps. We began by giving the program a name that Jeff came up with, *The Pirate Underground*. Then we defined what we could offer in the beginning and what we would like to offer as the program grew. We created a student survey to see what kind of interest might be out there and conducted it during the students’ English classes. We took the survey results to the principal and asked if he could find some funding to support our student teacher in running the program. For additional funding, I successfully applied for a \$500 *Connie Hull Grant* that was offered through the Oregon Association of School Libraries.

The Pirate Underground was born. We met two nights a week for one hour. Our initial focus was on reading and creative writing and, to the extent we could support them, art activities. The first year *The Pirate Underground* hosted a small, but dedicated group of students. There were no real requirements for those who came except to sign in. They could participate in the activities we presented if they wanted. They almost always did.





Close up of a “Black Out Poetry” activity presented by library clerk Anita McHaney.



Jee Seon “Rain” Eo and Jui-Tung “Melody” Chang are creating a Zentangle taught to them by community Artist Joan Crawford.



Close up of a Zentangle.

I wanted to see the program open up to anything in the “arts.” So I approached people at the Coos Art Museum who directed me to the Bay Area Artists Association. I shared my idea with the assistant Directors of both the Coos Bay and North Bend Public Libraries. I was looking to tap into the interests of the high schools fandom community. Students talked excitedly about Enochian, Gleeks, Whovians and other groups they followed. That did not pan out the first year, but this year students stepped forward to present. They advertised their session as a *Fandom Gathering*. The fandom sessions doubled participation the first night.

The Coos Bay Public Library offered to host an open mic and art exhibition night if we were able to put something together. I continued to work on making connections with members of the community throughout the summer.

We are in our second year of *The Pirate Underground*. Jeff has moved on to another school district, but my library assistant successfully applied for the position. I don’t run the sessions, but I continue to offer ideas and work on finding more community volunteers. This year, 100 percent of the funding for the extra-duty stipend came from the building principal and the superintendent. The *Bay Area Artist Association* (BAAA) gave the program \$150 for supplies and agreed to have an artist volunteer come for one hour a week to work with the students. The Coos Art Museum donated art supplies and the promise to offer scholarships to students interested in their programs when possible.

My ears are always tuned to tips for program ideas and people I can contact so *The Pirate Underground* program can continue to grow. We now have a student who has stepped forward to host several sessions to her fellow fandom followers on writing Enochian. Another student has stepped for-





Skylar Houghtaling, Bailey Elkins and Kierstin Martin present to a group of Fandom followers.



Gabrielle Beauchamp, Naketa Smith, Michaela Barnes and Katie Baimbridge working on creating perspective of an object. Session taught by community Artist Charles Edmunds.



Student Victor Elam works on learning the heavy metal ballad —Floods.

ward to host board gamers who want to play *Pandemic*, *The Resistance*, and *King of Tokyo*. These board games were recommended and reviewed by students for students.

Two students are talking about getting a student readers' group going and some simple coding sessions. A staff member has agreed to offer 3–4 sessions on “How to Crochet,” and another has agreed to offer a similar number of sessions on “How to Create Floral Arrangements.” Right now I am trying to locate a community member who will spend some time with eight of our boys who want to learn and share what they know about playing electric guitar.

This fall, *The World* newspaper did a front page article about *The Pirate Underground*. (<http://tinyurl.com/knht7h5>) I loved the quote by student Jessica Baimbridge who said, “You’re sitting in a classroom for 45 to 50 minutes straight and here you get to do what you actually like.” Staff writer Chelsea Davis indicated in an email that she related to the students in *The Pirate Underground*. Actually, I think a lot of people do. Since the article appeared, people have come forward with other suggestions. Have I approached the local Coos County Radio Club or the Coos County Master Gardeners? The answer is, “Not yet.” But, if it is something the kids want to do, I will try to find someone and some way to support it. 🐉