

# Easy and Inexpensive Display Ideas for the Small Library

Anne Sanders

During the past thirteen years, I have made many posters, signs, brochures, flyers, and pamphlets for the libraries and bookmobiles in a four-county regional public library system. Two of the libraries have glass-enclosed display cases at each end of the circulation desk. I have prepared monthly exhibits in those cases for eight years. With meager funds, the task has been a real challenge, and it is with this in mind that I have written this article. By seeking alternatives to spending money, librarians with small budgets can provide attractive and fresh displays.

This article is for persons with little or no training in graphics and design. It is not intended as a blueprint for making displays but as a stimulus for the creative worker.

## Some Basic Tips

Be ever on the lookout for ideas. As you shop or browse for yourself, notice the decorations and promotional items around you. Learn to look carefully through magazines and newspapers for "catchy" captions, phrases, words, and pictures for clip art. Look on every experience as an opportunity to get an idea. Just taking a walk can sometimes bring to mind a way to use leaves, shells, and other such items.

Learn who the collectors are in your area. A veritable unending supply of curios may exist in the attic of one of your library patrons. Since nearly everyone collects something, it's only a matter of finding them. Often, one collector leads you to another.

Plan a year of displays at a time by choosing a general theme to work around. You can always deviate from it if something more interesting pops up.

Make regular trips to hobby shops, gift shops, and dime stores just to look for display items. Go ahead and buy the items that catch your eye; plan a use later.

Keep your materials and supplies organized and in an accessible place. A quick glance through the boxes and shelves will tell you whether or not

you need to buy something new for your next display.

Plan around books. I use the displays primarily to promote books on a particular subject. Check first to make sure there are enough books on the shelves to complete your display. If you plan ahead, you can borrow through interlibrary loan the books you lack in your library.

## Materials for Display

This list will grow with almost every display. So far, I found the following items useful.

**Fabric:** This has been essential to nine out of ten of the displays I have done. To date, I have accumulated about fifteen different colors and kinds of fabrics from burlap and felt to taffeta and velvet. This material is usually draped loosely on the shelf. It provides color and softness for the display.

**Gift Wrap Paper:** For a base, for cutouts, and for backdrops, this is attractive and useful. Just look at the variety available, and for less than a dollar, you have a versatile item to work with.

**Other Paper Goods:** Paper napkins, cups, plates, and placemats change design from year to year. You only have to browse, look, and imagine what you can do with them. Doilies are useful for a Valentine motif, of course, but can also be cut into snowflakes or used for lace collars and cuffs.

**Boxes and Cans:** Positioned under a drape, boxes and cans of assorted shapes and sizes are useful for stands. A display on more than one level is sometimes necessary.

**Cake Decorations:** I happened on these as I was looking for something else and have been adding several a year to my collection. So far, the collection includes a hunter, a fisherman, a tennis player, a jogger, a skier, dancers, basketball and football players, a surfer, a witch, a skateboarder, a ship captain, a golfer, and, of course, a bride and groom. I use them in a variety of ways with other miniature props for seasonal displays. Children love them.

**Natural Objects:** Pine cones, leaves, straw, vegetables, fruit, seashells — all make attractive fill-ins. I use sand a lot in the summer but always

Anne Sanders is Director of the East Albemarle Regional Library in Elizabeth City, North Carolina.

put it in shallow boxes lined with aqua terry cloth to make cleaning up easy.

*Items From Home:* I used just about every figurine, dish, placemat, and other portable object I own. Not only does it save money, it saves storage space at the library.

*Baskets:* For holding books or a Thanksgiving harvest, baskets are great. Keep your eye out for sales and get four just alike.

*Artificial Objects:* Plastic fruit, vegetables, flowers, and foliage are all versatile, durable, and easy to store.

*Miniatures:* Make your own little presents to put under a little Christmas tree. Buy any tiny object, such as a woodstove, when you come across one. I shop at a local flea market for my miniatures.

*Imitation Turf:* This is good for a putting green, football field, or meadow. It's expensive but will last until you retire. You need only four twelve-inch squares.

*Jigsaw Puzzles:* One of the United States and one of your state can be used with travel and local history themes. If you can't find a puzzle, a road-map will do.

*Little Sign Holders:* Make your own or buy some from a library supplier. Always caption your displays; you may think your theme is obvious, but the display will be wasted if you don't make your message clear. Save the covers from catalogs. The stiff white paper on the inside is good for signs and holders.

*Book Supports:* Use metal bookends or some other device to support the books that you want to stand upright.

*Ribbons:* I use the wide ones for borders and the narrow ones for little bows which can be used in many ways.



A display on *Scherenschnitte*, the art of paper cutting, shows how the work of a local craftsman can be used in an attractive exhibit.



Ballet shoes autographed by Patricia McBride form the focal point of a display on dance.

*Linens:* Hand-worked placemats, luncheon cloths, and napkins make good display devices for cookbooks and other home-oriented themes.

*School-Related Items:* Notebooks, pennants, and even football helmets from area schools are good for all-year decorator items in YA areas. For back-to-school themes, add artificial apples and small slates.

*Greeting Cards:* Save your Valentines, birthday cards, and all greeting cards. They can be cut out and pasted for posters.

*Special Helps:* These items are not cheap, but are worth the investment for the amateur. Lettering devices, kits with special pens, stencils, and adhesive tape can be used by anyone. Press-on or rub-on letters are attractive and easy to use. The only drawback is the expense, since vowels are used up before consonants, and a whole sheet must be purchased for the few letters you need. A calligraphy set is useful for anyone who is adept at freehand lettering. The effect is beautiful, but not everyone can do it. A stencil maker is expensive but ideal for the small library. Easy to use, small in size, and versatile, this machine (combined with a mimeograph machine) is only one step behind an offset press.

*Photographs:* Take a picture of every display and poster you make. These pictures are useful for many reasons and will portray one facet of the library's history.

## Posters

Posters are my favorite things to make because of their possibilities. They can be small or large; one, two, or three dimensional; drawn on;

pasted on; stapled on; and even sewn on. For the creative person, a blank piece of poster paper is a playground, where scraps of material, magic markers, and rickrack can be used for interesting effects.

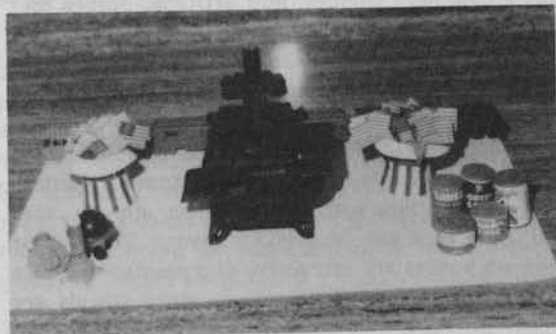
Go through junk mail for pictures and captions to paste onto a colored background. This is the easiest kind of poster to make, but it can be effective when used with a quotation or "catchy" caption.

Use fabric, fake fur, rickrack, buttons, glitter, fringe, doilies, felt, fake eyes, yarn, rope, ribbon, leaves, and other lightweight items for hair, borders, and outlines. These are especially helpful for the person who can't draw.

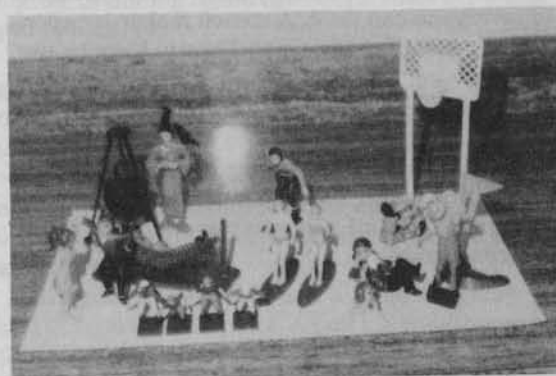
Study greeting cards, ads, and commercial displays for adaptable ideas. Despite your first impression, all of these are usually simple designs.

Use a lettering machine or some other kind of prepared letters unless you do good freehand printing.

Make a list of subject areas on the back of each poster to suggest books to accompany the poster. Have each branch listed on the back so that the posters can circulate to all bookmobiles and branch libraries.



"Buy any tiny object, such as a woodstove, when you come across one."



Cake decorations can be used in a variety of ways for seasonal displays.

Cut poster paper in half for most displays in order to economize. My theory is that it is better to spend a little time and money on a lot of posters than a lot of time and money on one poster.

Display posters on easels rather than thumbtacking them on a wall or bulletin board. This makes them more visible.

Keep posters simple. Curb your desire to fill up every inch and put in only essential information.

In conclusion, there is a vast supply of ideas "out there," but you have to be on the lookout for them. For example, a local craftsman's fair is one place to solicit interesting items for display. Most of the participants will be flattered to be invited to exhibit their wares. Likewise, while in a dress shop recently, I overheard a customer mention that she had a large hat collection. I immediately asked her if she would consider displaying some of them; she agreed. Another instance involved a friend of mine whose daughter is a professional ballerina. When the library recently acquired a number of books on dance, I borrowed a tutu, a pair of worn ballet shoes autographed by Patricia McBride, and some dance programs from her for the display.

After thirteen years of creating displays, posters, and other promotional items, I naturally feel threatened at times by burnout. When that happens, I get up, go out, and make my rounds. Something always turns up.

#### APPENDIX I

#### Themes I Have Used

##### *Collections from patrons*

- antique bottles
- handmade lace and other fancy needlework
- bargello and needlepoint
- antique dolls
- antique Christmas cards
- antique toys
- banks
- memorabilia and souvenirs of the Royal Family
- thermometers
- fans
- frog statues
- cupid statues
- seashells
- sheet music
- elephant
- pigs
- Victorian jewelry
- old kitchen utensils
- Depression glass
- paperweights
- old valentines
- tin soldiers
- egg craft
- decoys
- old children's books
- stained glass

## Other

futurism  
consumerism  
heraldry  
gardening  
romance  
inspirational books  
health and beauty  
cookbooks  
birds  
travel  
all sports in season: hunting, golf, basketball  
hobbies  
all popular holidays  
boating  
current events  
money management  
do-it-yourself  
past best sellers  
animals  
dancing  
art  
preserving and canning  
school aids  
banned books  
Egyptology  
Foreign Language Center  
Ireland  
investments  
children's books from around the world  
winterizing your home  
fishing and boating  
personal grooming and hygiene  
old age  
weddings  
ways to earn money at home  
ballet  
local crafts  
North Carolina books  
self-help  
back to school  
child-rearing

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