

THE QUIZ PROGRAM AND CHILDREN'S READING

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The quiz program we have had so long with us that, at first thought, it might seem to have passed its zenith as a publicity method. However, as far as children are concerned, this is definitely not true. Librarians who yearn for new ways of promoting juvenile reading are prone to forget that a constantly changing clientele keeps fresh what would otherwise be old and trite. The quiz program in its various forms is adaptable to a considerable number of situations, ranging all the way from the broadcasting studio to the individual school classroom. The variety of questions based on books is limited only by the boundaries of the field of children's literature itself.

Two fundamental requirements should be kept in mind if the quiz program is to be a success. First, the organizer and the master of ceremonies (who may or may not be the same person) must have a wide knowledge of children's books. This is absolutely essential if the program is to be broadcast over the radio, both for the preparation of questions and for the skillful handling of random answers which will always crop up during an unrehearsed program. It is of less importance, of course, in school or library programs where the audience is mainly children, who are less exacting and critical than a radio audience. Second, as large a number of children as possible must participate in the program. This is most important, regardless of the size and character of the audience. The participation may take the form of actually answering questions on the stage or before the microphone or of preparing questions to be used on the program.

Obviously only a limited group can be performers, but any number of children may share in the latter activity.

A description of the way in which one series of programs was organized will illustrate the way in which large numbers of children may be included in such a project. This series, called WHAT'S FUN TO READ, was sponsored by the Durham Public Library and broadcast over radio station WDNC. It began in October and continued weekly until mid-February the first year. The second year it began in October and ran through December. In order to stimulate an interest in the project a club was organized several months before the radio series was scheduled to start, the cooperation of the broadcasting station having been assured. Children who wished to qualify for a place on the program as "book experts" joined the club. They read as extensively as they could and the library kept a record of each child's reading. Club meetings took the form of practice quiz programs. In the fall six children from each school in the city were chosen to make up the teams who would answer questions during the broadcast. Most of them came from the club but a few were chosen on the recommendation of their teachers in school. Two teams participated in each program. They scored a certain number of points, graded according to the difficulty of the questions, for each question correctly answered. Each team scored for its school, not for individual members. All children were invited to submit questions and those accepted for use on the program added more points to the score of the school from which they came. Also the children who sent them in received recognition on the air. At the end of the series the school having the highest score received several new books

for its library. Sixty children only had places on the programs but several hundred submitted questions.

In making out the questions for a quiz program several considerations must be kept in mind. First of all, they must not be too difficult for the children to answer. This means that they must be based on books which they know or may reasonably be supposed to have read. The reading records kept for club members were carefully consulted when questions were being formulated. Secondly, since the interest of an audience is greater in questions which it, too, can answer (mentally, of course), care must be taken to use as many questions as possible based on books with which the audience may reasonably be supposed to be familiar. This means using a judicious mixture of old and new favorites. In the third place, the librarian must never lose sight of the fact that her primary aim is to stimulate reading. This involves propounding questions which are designed to bring out the intriguing high spots in a book as often as possible. If the master of ceremonies can manage to draw spontaneous comments from the children on the program, the interest will be greatly increased.

The response to WHAT'S FUN TO READ was so active and widespread that the time and effort involved seemed well-spent. However, there should be no illusion about the amount of both required. Approximately two days of each week were needed for the preparation of the fifteen-minute program. It should be emphasized, however, that a radio series is the most difficult form in which the quiz program can be used. Much easier and less time-consuming would be the individual programs suitable for story hours, club meetings or school auditorium use.