

January 2016

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### Recommended Citation

Naghelout, Anna (2016) "A Student-Led Book Drive to Promote Summer Reading," *Michigan Reading Journal*: Vol. 48: Iss. 2, Article 7.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj/vol48/iss2/7>

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# A Student-Led Book Drive to Promote Summer Reading

by Anna Nagelhout

I could compare my bedroom to a library. Bookshelves tower up to the ceiling, filled with books I have received since the day I was born. I had always taken these books for granted, and I couldn't wait to get some new ones to read during summer break. One day my brother and I were dragged along to work with my mom, and I wasn't all too pleased. However, it proved to be a valuable experience.

My mother is a reading teacher, who works with students at Jane Adams Elementary outside of Detroit. Upon getting to work with some of her students, I realized that the only books many children had were the ones they took home for homework each night. My mom is constantly lecturing my brother and me on the importance of summer reading, telling us that reading five books can make the difference between maintaining our reading level and falling behind by up to three months. What if children had the opportunity to choose books of their liking to bring home for the summer? I thought a book drive for summer reading could help make this possible.

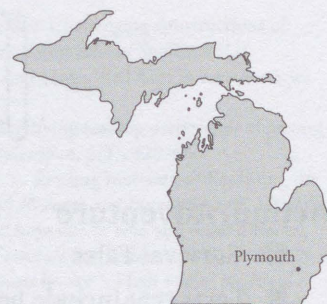
*"More than 80 percent of children from economically disadvantaged communities lose reading skills over the summer because they lack access to books, learning resources, and such enrichment opportunities as trips to the library, bookstore, or museum."* (<http://www.rif.org/pdf/Literacy-Facts-Stats.pdf>)

*"In Wayne County, 39 percent of children live in poverty"* (Michigan League for Public Policy, [http://www.mlpp.org/misc/KidsCount2015\\_FINAL\\_RGB\\_WEB.pdf](http://www.mlpp.org/misc/KidsCount2015_FINAL_RGB_WEB.pdf))

I created a flyer asking for gently used books for grades K-5 and passed it out to over 500 houses



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in my neighborhood. The donations came rolling in, and the end result was a total of 2,000 books allowing over 300 students to choose at least five free books each for summer reading! Over 400 of these books were generously donated by the United Way of Plymouth, Michigan. Luckily enough, Mrs. Morrow of Plymouth's United Way was one of my neighbors who had received the flyer. She contacted me and kindly assisted my book drive.

The book drive was a huge success. All of the students left with big smiles on their faces, excited to read. Many of the children couldn't even wait until they got home to read the books. They simply plopped down on the carpet and began to read immediately. I think the words of the children (taken from their many thank you letters) best express the impact of the book drive.

"Thank you for going to 500 houses just so that we can read in the summer." -Amarri

"Thank you for all the books. You are the best in the world for giving me books. We love you." -Jay'shaw

"I got two books for my little brother because he doesn't have any." -Christian

"I am happy you spent your time on us and donated over 2,000 books. I can't wait to read them!" -Kenneth

Sadly, at the end of the summer, my next door neighbor Toni Barr passed away after a long battle



with cancer. During the previous spring, she had read my flyer and had made numerous donations to the students of Jane Addams. After her funeral, her daughters approached my mother asking if the book drive was ongoing. They led us into the garage where they had been gathering their mother's belongings. Being the book lover and reader that she was, there were hundreds of children's books. The daughters insisted we take these books as a tribute to their mother who had lovingly wanted to help as many children read as possible. As a result of this generous donation, my mother was able to pass out free books to each Jane Addams family on September 8th as part of Jane Addams' Welcome Back Popsicles on the Playground event. In addition, I will be helping her pass out free books prior to the December holiday break and the March Bingo for Books event.

When I began the book drive project in the spring of 2015, my intent had been to help other children enjoy a summer of reading as I had been able to do for my entire childhood. What I didn't plan on was what I would receive in return. The many hugs, thank you cards, and donations were incredibly gratifying to receive. I wish to thank the Jane

Addams' families, the United Way, and Plymouth residents for their kindness, help and donations. It is my hope to continue this work on an ongoing basis as part of a yearly book drive.

## Author Biography

My name is **Anna Nagelhout**, and I am currently in 9th grade at Canton High School in Plymouth, Michigan. I am enrolled in the International Academy, which puts me on track to graduate with an International Baccalaureate (IB) diploma. My favorite subjects are Language Arts, Social Studies, and Biology. When I get older I would like to go to medical school and become a pediatrician, as I love being around children. In my spare time I enjoy running; I ran for Canton's girl's cross-country team during the fall. Another big interest of mine is piano, which I have been playing for about eight years now. Of course, reading has been a part of my life since I was too small to even hold a book! I also enjoy writing, particularly poetry. A goal of mine for many years has been to get a piece of work published, so I am very excited to be in this journal!





