



Pauletta Berry

## How Library Volunteers Can Help Your Small School



*“Volunteers don’t get paid, not because they’re worthless, but because they’re priceless.”<sup>1</sup> – Sherry Anderson.*

Serving as a library volunteer has been one of my joys for the past few years. Because a teacher’s schedule is packed, one of the best decisions regarding the library might be to find a volunteer who loves books and children. Many retirees enjoy having time to contribute to their community and can be a valuable resource for the school. After a few weeks, you will know the strengths of your volunteer(s), what training might be needed, and the tasks they can handle well.

As a volunteer, I spend every Tuesday morning at school working with another volunteer. Our school has five teachers. Each teacher has two grades in her classroom. We have a small room that houses 10,000 books used by grades K-8. Classes visit the library on Tuesday mornings. We have 30 minutes for each class. The classroom teacher sends three to four students at a time, and we check books in and out and help students make selections as needed. Your school may be smaller, but my ideas would work well even in individual classrooms.

If your library currently needs to be more organized, the first task of your volunteer would be to label

and organize the books. First, divide the books by audience: elementary, junior, and teen. Fiction can be labeled and shelved alphabetically by the author and non-fiction by the Dewey system. Resist the temptation to print lengthy call numbers, and use only the first three digits or up to two decimal places on each call number. This will make it much easier to shelve books in a small library.

Once the books are ready for checkout, set a schedule for library visits. Volunteers can also enhance a teacher’s classroom resources by gathering books from the library on a requested topic and taking them to the classroom for research that week.

If the volunteers are trained in your school’s curriculum needs and reading goals, they can also select books for the library. I spend several hours each quarter reading book reviews and compiling lists of books that would be great additions to our library. This task relieves teachers of extra hours in their work schedule. Teachers should communicate to the volunteer a list of books that would be useful in their classroom for study or student reading. As a volunteer, when I have prepared a list of books for purchase, I submit the list to the school principal for review before the final order is placed.

Our school uses Resource Mate (<https://www.resource-mate.com/>) to catalog our library collection. As new books arrive, volunteers log the books on the com-

puter, print labels, stamp the books with the school's name and address, and add library book pockets and date cards. We are currently considering updating our library books with bar codes so we can use a scanner to check out books and fully use our library system. This process will be time intensive. Again, it will all be done entirely by volunteers.

Schools are periodically scheduled for an accreditation review. A part of that process involves an audit and evaluation of your school library. Volunteers are very familiar with the library content. They will help tally resource totals, complete the forms, and prepare the library for evaluation.

Volunteers can also do the following things:

- Keep the library space clean, attractive, and well organized;
- Put up bulletin boards to encourage reading and create interesting book displays;
- Repair damaged books;
- Weed out old and unsuitable books;
- Keep track of overdue books, and prepare reminders for teachers to share with parents;
- Conduct or organize story time with younger children;
- Think of fun and creative ideas like having a Library Lion mascot or inviting a reading assistance program to bring therapy animals to the classroom so children can read to them
- And finally, their spouses or friends may have woodworking talents to help build new library shelves or other skills that might be useful to the library.

Volunteers are truly Friends of the Library. So, before giving up on having a quality library, look for some great volunteers. Start small with one or two of the ideas or duties above. Be sure volunteers have gone through appropriate background checks to work with children.<sup>2</sup> Watch them as they interact with the students to be sure they enhance the learning atmosphere. As confidence grows in the volunteers, share some of the goals and dreams for the library with them. Don't overwhelm them with too much at once; add additional volunteers if needed. Two or more kindred spirits often make the task more fun and allow vol-

unteers to have days off as needed without sacrificing library days. And don't forget small tokens of appreciation or simply saying thank you to your volunteers. ✍

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**NOTES AND REFERENCES**

1. Quotation credited to Sherry Anderson, *Goodreads* (2022): <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/487430-volunteers-dont-get-paid-not-because-they-re-worthless-but-because>.
2. Angel Barrios, "4-step Screening Process," *Adventist Risk Management* (March 2, 2021): <https://adventistrisk.org/en-us/safety-resources/solutions-newsletter/2021/march/nadeng-4-step-screening-process>.

