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## It's cool inside... the library

During the summer, local libraries expend a lot of creative effort to lure young book lovers to their neck of the desert. Here is my Top Ten list of why parents should make a habit of summer library visits with their children:

10) Library fines for overdue materials are more forgiving than the video-store variety. (And there's no need to "be kind and rewind.")

9) It's cool inside.

8) You can help your child avoid a sudden decrease in brain cell "cabin pressure" as a result of the plunging academic descent characteristic of summer.

7) Being hushed by a children's librarian makes you feel young again.

6) It's cool inside (bears repeating).

5) It's quiet, too.

4) Books are a more economical way to travel the world than trying to cram in a global junket with kids in tow.

3) You can meet interesting people. People who read are by nature interesting. And people who like to hang out at libraries can provide a different sort of entertainment.

2) It's cool inside!

And finally . . .

1) Summer is a golden opportunity to foster pleasure reading in your child—and yourself. Pleasure reading leads to lifelong reading.

As if these weren't reasons enough to load up the kids for a weekly library trek, Valley libraries have sweetened the pot with this year's children's summer reading program: "Extra! Extra! Read Your Way to the Ballpark!" A continuation of last year's home-run hit, and again co-sponsored by The Arizona Diamondbacks and *The Arizona Republic*, the program offers encouragement and prizes for young readers of all ages—even infants, who qualify by having a parent or sibling read to them.

The program runs from May 29 through July 28. Participating libraries include Apache Junction, Avondale, Buckeye, Chandler, Desert Foothills (Cave Creek), Glendale, Maricopa County Library District, Mesa, Peoria, Phoenix, Scottsdale, Tempe and Wickenburg.

Participants in last year's program were entered into a drawing for tickets to a Diamondbacks game. This year, the Diamondbacks are offering a game ticket to every child who completes the reading program.

I'm thinking of posing as a child this summer so I can earn the certificate of completion signed by none other than Tony Womack, stealer of bases and fans' hearts. (Something tells me I wouldn't fool anyone but I sure would enjoy reading so many children's books in the attempt.)



A book I might choose in an effort to get in the good graces of the children's librarian is *The Library Dragon*, written by Carmen Agra Deedy and illustrated by Michael P. White. My 10-year-old son Sean agreed to read this book, along with some others, with me in preparation for this month's column. I asked him to rate *The Library Dragon* on a scale from one to 10, and he emphatically gave it a "10."

Both Sean and I enjoyed the subtle humor in the puns and illustrations throughout this book about dragon librarian Miss Lotta Scales. She protects her books fiercely from "gooey fingers and snotty noses" (her words, not mine).

In the end, Miss Scales makes a near complete transformation from dragon to human but she does keep a list of library manners such as "Treat a book like you treat a friend—you don't wipe your nose on your friend."

The next book Sean and I read was *The Library*, written by Sarah Stewart and illustrated by David Small. The Sean score on this one also was a "10." I had a feeling it would be when he laughed hysterically at the first page, which showed infant Elizabeth Brown falling out of the sky and the words

*Elizabeth Brown  
Entered the world  
Dropping straight down from  
the sky.*

*Elizabeth Brown  
Entered the world  
Skinny, nearsighted, and shy.*

The story continues with rhyming text about Elizabeth's lifelong love affair with books.

It was getting late, but Sean insisted we read *Tomás and the Library Lady*, written by Pat Mora and illustrated by Raul Colon. This is a story about Tomás, the son of migrant farm workers. He is shown moving from Texas to Iowa for the season, carrying water to his parents in the fields and playing with a ball his mother had sewn from an old teddy bear.

As we were reading, Sean was quiet. I stopped and asked if he liked the story.

"It's sad," he replied, "But I like it."

Tomás is encouraged to devour books by "the Library Lady." Sean and I got a bit choked up when we discovered that Tomás was a real person named Tomás Rivera who became a writer, professor, university educator and a national education leader. The library at the University of California at Riverside where Rivera was chancellor now bears his name.

"Library Ladies" and "Library Gentlemen" everywhere are luring (which means "to entice or tempt with the promise of pleasure or gain") young folks to their stacks. Summer reading program prizes are indeed enticing, yet the true pleasure and gain is found in the reading of captivating books.

