

A no cost program with a big return for children's booksellers

By Heather Hebert, Children's Book World

We are about to head into the time of year when fall galleys start flooding into our stores. It always starts out nice and organized and then inevitably the galleys completely overtake your office, your back room, your storage area. Your instinct is to get rid of them, but wait, **DO NOT GET RID OF YOUR FALL GALLEYS** until you read this first. We have been running a program for the last twelve years that brings customers in repeatedly, builds a sense of community, generates tons of goodwill and it costs nothing, and takes next to no time set up and run. It is our read and review summer program for children, tweens and Young Adults.

Every summer we take most of the fall galleys we receive put them in crates according to age group (3rd- 5th grade, 6th -8th and YA). We then send out an email inviting our customers to read and review these ARCS for us. Each child is allowed to take out one book at a time and keep it for up to two weeks. A one page review sheet is given with each book. We do not want this to feel like homework so we keep the questions light and simple. They can either be answered with pretty much one sentence (or even one word) such as , "would you recommend this book to your friend?" and some of the questions are even in scale form, such as "rate this book on a scale of 1 to 10 - one being awful and 10 being totally awesome!" Everytime a book and review are turned in, a dollar store credit is given. At the end of the summer, these credits can be redeemed.

The success we have with this program has been incredible! For one thing it keeps customers coming in over and over through out the summer. And although they do not necessarily make a purchase every time they come in to the store to borrow a galley, they certainly make more purchases than they would if they had no incentive to visit the store.

We have also found that this program creates a boatload of goodwill. Kids are beyond excited to be the first in their group of friends to read these advance copies. Parents are thrilled with the "special treatment" that their children are getting by being allowed to have access to books before they are published. And schools are so enthused by a program that gets kids excited about reading that they often publicize the program to their student body. Getting our store's information to hundreds of children who might never have been in our store before.

After the summer is over many of the kids come in to buy a book with their review credit. It is always astonishing to us that so many of them choose to purchase the new hardback version of the galley they have just read over the summer. And since the average number of books read by a child is usually around four and a new hardback cost about \$16.99 - well, you can do the math.

But in all honesty the best part of this program is the reviews we get directly from the

target audience of these books. There have been numerous times that a book we dismissed during the buying season has been reviewed over and over again by our young readers and has consistently been given 10s (totally awesomes). We have learned to order more of those titles because the amazing thing is, they haven't been wrong yet! That kind of feedback is priceless and makes sharing an office with hundreds of fall ARCs for a few months much more bearable.