

WHAT IS A PUBLIC LIBRARY

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There are three different kinds of libraries and they all have different missions. Academic libraries (like the Park Library) support the curriculum of the institution and, to varying degrees, support the research interests of the faculty, so academic libraries have a wealth of information in the areas that they offer degrees in, but very little outside of those disciplines. Therefore, they won't have a lot of popular fiction, or children's materials, DIY books, feature films, travel guides, or young adult materials for instance. Another type of library that is very similar to the academic library is the school media center. The goal of the media center is to support the school's curriculum as well. So they won't have any adult-oriented materials.

Special libraries are another type that focuses on the interests of their institutions or specialties like corporate libraries, law libraries, and the private libraries of institutions, etc. As you could guess, they support the goals of their parent institutions.

Public libraries, however, support the general informational, recreational, and life-long learning needs of all the citizens in their community. We don't have a parent institution dictating what we need to support, the public is our clientele. So the public library has items and programs for everyone from preschool age to retirement age. Examples of things we have for children are story-times every Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday, picture books, and children's DVDs. For older kids we have chapter books, a bunch of non-fiction books on topics they are interested in or that they are assigned in school, DVDs, magazines, and computer games. Young adults have their own section of

the library with fiction books, non-fiction books, computers, audiobooks, graphic novels, and their own magazines. There is also a Teen Advisory Board made up of local teens that helps plan programs and gives suggestions on what materials to buy for their age group. The largest portion of the collections is devoted to the interests of adults. For them we have a wide range of non-fiction materials on practically any interest, fiction books divided into 5 genres, DVDs, music CDs, audiobooks, computers with internet access and Microsoft Office products on them. In addition to these things, the library has a computer lab that the public is free to use as well as free computer classes every month. We also have a fax machine and photocopiers for the public. We have 3 meeting rooms that can accommodate groups from as small as 2 to as many as 200 people. So, you can see that the public library has a greater diversity of materials and programs than any other type. Hopefully I have helped you to recognize the difference between a public library and the other types of libraries. If you have other questions about how a library runs or what we do, please email me at cfriedr@crdl.org. I'll try to answer them in a future article.