

LEAD THE WAY WITH LARGE PRINT BOOKS

Thorndike Press Large Print—Learn how this school is successfully introducing large print books and helping students obtain and develop the skills necessary to become confident readers.

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Tasha Squires,
Librarian,
O'Neill Middle School
Downers Grove, IL

BACKGROUND

Located in Downers Grove, Illinois, O'Neill Middle School is a vibrant public school serving 7th–8th grade students. Tasha Squires has been the school librarian for nearly 10 years and was previously a teen librarian at a large public library in Chicago. She is passionate about supporting and educating children and young adults through library resources such as large print. When Squires first came to O'Neill, her school didn't have large print books. After participating in a webinar, she chose to participate in a large print initiative with Thorndike Press which brought over 100 titles to O'Neill Middle School with the goal of helping students obtain, develop, and strengthen their literacy skills.

ABOUT THE CHALLENGE MEETING STUDENTS AT EVERY READING LEVEL

“Teachers are always looking for books to add to their classroom library,” says Squires. “When I started as a teen librarian, I was introduced to large print books and purchased a few for visually impaired students who might need them. But I found that other students liked these books as an alternative to regular print.” Squires came to see large print as a larger piece of the puzzle in helping young adults along their path to becoming successful readers.

As a school librarian, Squires has students that couldn't read even close to the reading level for their grade. She wanted to find a way to reach those students by offering an alternative to the regular print books they were using. “I immediately made the teachers aware of some publishers that I knew from my public library experience that had books for teens at a lower reading level. When I learned more about large print books from Thorndike Press, I realized I had to add them to my collection. It struck me that large print could be a great connection between the lower level reading materials and regular text/reading level books,” says Squires.

When O'Neill Middle School's reading specialist, Bernice Homel, began using large print books, she was pleasantly surprised by the physical similarities to standard print books, “I was impressed with seeing the size of the books—they're very comparable to regular print books.” And what's more, Squires found that kids don't mind the difference, “We need to let kids dictate to us what they want, because overwhelmingly they said they want books in this [large print] format.”

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Bernice Homel,
Reading Specialist,
O'Neill Middle School
Downers Grove, IL

WHAT DO STUDENTS HAVE TO SAY?¹

62.9%
said they read for longer periods of time

66.1%
said they could concentrate better

■ BRIDGING THE GAP

GIVING STUDENTS A CHOICE AND INCREASING ACCESS

When it comes to creating a large print collection, Squires recommends jumping right in. "Put aside your preconceptions, because the kids don't have them!" First, embrace students' freedom of choice. If a teacher is planning a lesson on *The Outsiders*, encourage him or her to provide multiple formats (regular print, large print, audio, graphic novels) in the classroom library. Autonomy goes a long way with kids. When students have the freedom to choose what format best suits their needs, they are more willing to engage with the content. The goal is to get students reading, and if they are active participants in the process of choosing how they read, they'll be set up for success.

"We have to advocate for students and make sure they have the opportunity to access these amazing resources," says Squires. Large print titles are often the same physical size or smaller than their hardcover or trade paper counterparts. By using thinner, higher quality paper and laying out the text to maximize the use of white space, Thorndike Press can produce large print books that are similar in size to other editions. Larger font sizes are easier to read, and greater leading (space between lines) improves readers' ability to track the line being read.² Squires adds, "These books aren't just for striving readers—they work for ALL readers. Large print texts are part of the larger picture for reading in general, because they help students overcome challenges they might have and allow them to be successful."

■ THE RESULT

BECOMING CONFIDENT, FUTURE-READY LEARNERS

Large print is effective in helping improve decoding, fluency, and comprehension in readers. As students become more comfortable reading, they develop confidence and determination to grow as learners. "I have noticed that some of my readers are more willing to read large print books and they actually focus. One of my reluctant readers has been reading more because of large print books. I'm excited to see that! I wish we had been using large print books earlier," says Homel.

Since beginning the large print initiative in January 2018, O'Neill's large print titles have had total circulation of 4.85%—an impressive percentage considering large print makes up only 136 titles of the library's total collection of 13,000 items. And Squires is hopeful that this number will continue to grow as they add to O'Neill Middle School's large print collections.

¹ From a survey of 66 participating O'Neill Middle School 7th–8th graders regarding reading large print for the first time in classroom and library settings (Jan. – May 2018).

² Legge, G. & Bigelow, C. Does Print Size Matter for Reading? (2014, August). Retrieved December 16, 2014 from <http://www.journalofvision.org/content/11/5/8.full>

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