

BATTLE OF THE BOOKS/TEEN IDOL: YOUNG ADULTS ENERGIZING WCFL

The second weekend in March proved extra busy for Washington County Free Library staff, who were staging the eagerly anticipated finales of two of their major programs for young people.

The Battle of the Books, a reading competition for kids in grades 4 to 6, drew over 20 teams of 8 students this year. The teams are formed at schools or by home-school families, and include an adult manager who coordinates the team and handles logistics.

During December and January the teams read 20 assigned books, which ranged from classics to recent award-winners. They completed two projects based on the books. Examples included: designing a cereal box and creating a video of a scene. Their grades on these projects, in addition to a round of written questions that test reading comprehension, determine the 8 teams that compete in the final round, where they answer further questions about the books.



This year's final, on Saturday, March 10, brought together kids and parents from all corners of the county, and was won by the Boonsboro Starbooks (punning team names being a Battle of the Books tradition).

Jeff Ridgeway, head of the Children's Department at the Hagerstown library, has been overseeing the Battle for many years, doing everything from choosing the books to grading

the projects and judging the final round. While acknowledging the large amount of work involved, he emphasizes the value of the program in encouraging reading and rewarding kids for their dedication, creativity and teamwork. Jeff would be happy to answer questions about the program from colleagues in other counties. He can be reached at pr01@washcolibrary.org.



Meanwhile, that evening, the finals of the library's **11th Annual Teen Idol competition** took place. What began as an American Idol-style singing competition has branched out into instrumental music, dancing, and even comedy. The 20 finalists were selected from over 40 entrants at preliminary rounds held in January, and the

finals took place on March 10th at the Maryland Theater, with 340 people in attendance. Ann Shilling, the YA librarian at Hagerstown who spearheads the event, explains that numerous library staff contribute to it, from helping backstage to taking photos to staffing the preliminary rounds.

In addition, the Maryland Theater staff handle box office, tickets, sound, and ushers; and a local production company provides a giant projection screen and video. The judges at the finals are local celebrities and performers with backgrounds in teaching and performing arts. The ticket revenue (\$10 per person) is used for the prizes – \$1,000 for first place and \$500 for second – and for rental of the theater (at a generously discounted rate), publicity, and printing.

This year's competition was won by Austin Swiger, an 18-year-old student at Hagerstown Community College.

Ann would be happy to answer questions from colleagues in other counties; she can be reached at ashilling@washcolibrary.org.

