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**Going for the Gold: Recruiting Students and Engaging Administrators through  
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**Michele D. Behr  
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### **Abstract**

Western Michigan University Libraries partnered with the university administration's recruitment efforts on campus. Library staff created and hosted an evening of instructional games to provide experiential learning, social interaction, and fun in the library for scholarship-seeking millennials. Students discovered information in archival materials, compared search results in a library database and Google, examined plagiarism issues, formatted citations, and used the catalog to locate specific items throughout the library. In their evaluations, students reported they learned about finding library materials and plagiarism issues. They rated teamwork, the archival challenge, and catalog activities most enjoyable. The event built positive relationships within the library, across campus, and with future students.

Keywords: Student recruitment, library instruction, library partnerships, outreach, experiential learning, library orientation, library anxiety

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## **Introduction**

While academic librarians and even university administrators may assert that libraries are at the center of the educational enterprise, librarians often feel peripheral on campus. To counter this, it has been suggested that the library should take the initiative in recognizing the significant issues and developments on campus, and become involved in them. This affords librarians an opportunity to contribute to the overall success of the institutional enterprise as well as to work collegially with others in the university. This paper describes how a program was able to promote the library in student recruitment efforts on campus and to introduce potential freshman to the academic library in an engaging and non-threatening way.

The academic library may be near the top of a list of things that intimidate high school seniors when they are preparing to start college. Academic librarians have labored to provide orientation and basic instruction sessions for incoming freshmen to ease these fears. However, such sessions can all too easily make matters worse for apprehensive students by overloading them with the huge number of potential resources and the dizzying array of techniques they could use to access information. Alexander, Gaither and Tuckett (2002, 20) suggest: “perhaps we should be less concerned, as we plan our library orientation sessions, with presenting an abundance of what we see as ‘vital’ information, and more concerned with simply presenting the library as an engaging, dynamic information environment that they can come to see as something worth coming back to.” We decided to adopt this approach in designing our recruitment event. We hoped that, by giving potential students an enjoyable and engaging experience in the

library, we could allay their library anxiety and help persuade them to enroll at our institution.

## **Background**

Western Michigan University (WMU) is a large public institution that has been classified by the Carnegie Foundation as Doctoral Research Extensive. Currently, there are over 150 academic programs serving approximately 28,000 students at the Kalamazoo campus as well as offsite programs. The University Libraries hold approximately 2.1 million titles, with 9,700 periodical subscriptions.

Recently, WMU has been placing more focus and effort on enrollment and retention of students. As with many institutions of higher education, particularly in the Midwest, a bleak economy and rising tuition costs have deterred some students from entering or staying in college. While some academic institutions have experienced booming enrollments, others, like WMU, have sought to boost enrollments (Speed read: Recent reports on college admissions. 2005). In 2004-2005, the university began a concerted effort to increase enrollment and to put in place a comprehensive plan to attract and retain students.

One of the initiatives within this plan involved the Medallion Scholarship program for incoming freshmen; the program has existed for over twenty years. Medallion Scholarships are one of the largest merit-based awards in American higher education, and are valued at more than \$32,000 over four years. The awards are based on academic merit including GPA, ACT, and SAT scores. In the past, students competing for Medallion Scholarships came to campus for a weekend to participate in a series of activities that included writing an essay, team problem solving, and interviews with

faculty and administrators. The admissions office coordinated the Medallion weekends and administered the scholarship.

In 2005, administrators and consultants decided the Medallion program could be used as a recruitment tool. It was hoped that different activities might help persuade even those students who were not awarded scholarships to enroll at WMU. The Library Dean volunteered library participation in the activities, and admissions office staff enthusiastically accepted the offer.

### **Literature Review**

Our review of the literature concentrated in three areas: student recruitment activities; innovative approaches, particularly using social interaction to orient students to the library; and characteristics and learning styles of prospective freshman students.

We were unable to uncover any instances of a library playing any role in recruitment initiatives at another college or university. However, authors outside the library field have written about using orientation programs and social activities to attract and retain students (Allen 1993; Braxton and McClendon 2001). It has been shown that these kinds of activities can have a positive effect on student recruitment and retention, acting primarily as vehicles for students to get to know one another and become integrated into the institution.

Various libraries have adapted orientation and instruction sessions to deal with student perceptions of the library as intimidating or overwhelming. The literature revealed examples of libraries of all types--K-12, academic, and public--that use engaging and entertaining activities such as scavenger hunts within their instructional programs to get students oriented to the library and to begin to break down some of the

negative feelings they might have toward using the library. One example of this is the “Library Survivor Game” which was developed and conducted by the Coshocton Public Library as part of its young adult programming (Coshocton Public Library). According to the planners of this event, “the teens need to use their library skills but there is a lot of silliness and fun mixed in the process.” Examples of scavenger hunt type programs in the academic setting include activities at Simon Fraser University (Dutton 2000) and Youngstown State University (Isaac), where students worked in self-directed teams. Often, library orientation programs for high school students have social as well as instructional components intended to enhance student comfort levels and reduce the intimidation factor of an academic library (College Library Staff Provide Unique Service for Young Students 1993).

Various journal articles describe innovations with library orientation and instruction programs for lower level students and efforts to inject fun activities into these sessions. Most notably, Penn State University Libraries has instituted an open house type program for library orientation targeted to freshmen. Their approach emphasizes fun, social activities, to get the students into the library and reduce library anxiety (Cahoy and Bichel 2004). The University of Michigan Undergraduate Library has incorporated what they call “Infotainment” into their library orientation sessions. Their approach focuses on the learning styles and expectations of the so called “Net Generation” who they see as learning best in “flexible learning situations which provide opportunities for collaboration and chances to engage their often formidable critical thinking skills in active problem-solving situations” (Alexander, Gaither, and Tuckett 2002, 20).

The literature review provides useful insights into the characteristics of the millennial generation students and what kinds of activities most appeal to them. Oblinger (2003, 42) notes the importance of “understanding and meeting the expectations of ‘new students’ in [an institution’s] competitiveness”. She indicates that “millenials (born after 1982) ... gravitate to group activity, and ... favor experiential learning” (40). They are accustomed to trial and error problem-solving and decision-making, and the rapid feedback they get through interactive Internet games. Oblinger suggests “Speed and a sense of urgency can contribute to learner motivation” (44). Similarly, individuals who train Gen Xers in the workplace suggest: “Make it fun... make it fast-paced ... make it involving... make it chunky... and make it theirs by letting learners themselves discover the aha! moments” (Salopek 2000, 28-29).

### **Planning the Event**

Several brainstorming and organizational meetings took place between staff from the office of admissions and WMU librarians, library staff, and members of the libraries’ administration. The library event was scheduled for two and a half hours on each of two successive Friday evenings at a time when the library was not open to others. Between thirty and fifty students would participate each night. We wanted the event to be enjoyable, but we also decided that it should be intellectually challenging, especially as it was designed to showcase the university to a group of high achievers. Although we hoped that most of the students would become WMU freshman in the fall, we wanted to take the opportunity to teach concepts and skills that would be useful to them no matter where they chose to enroll and which library they would eventually use. Admissions staff



emphasized the need for the library event to have a social component so that students would have a chance to interact with one another and have fun.

We began by compiling a list of objectives for the event. Our intent was to make the students feel comfortable in the library, interact with one another, work with broad library concepts, and leave with the notions that the library is a welcoming place and library staff are knowledgeable, approachable, and friendly. We agreed that our activities should include the following:

1. Searching the library catalog
2. Orienting to the physical library / visiting a location on each floor
3. Locating sources in the library
4. Using a library article index
5. Citing sources and avoiding plagiarism
6. Asking for help / knowing where to go for help
7. Orienting to the library website
8. Experiencing the variety of materials / physical formats in the library.

After we agreed on what to teach, we moved on to the logistics of the activities that would cover these.

### **The Event**

We devised four different activities to address our objectives. The students tackled each activity as part of a team of four to six individuals, sufficiently small so that all team members would participate. To further encourage active participation, we used the kind of competitive format used by various popular TV shows. Two teams competed against one another at each activity for twenty minutes. An announcement signaled the

beginning and end of each activity period. Five minutes were allowed to move to the next activity, and, at each activity, a team encountered a different competitor team. We assigned two staff people at each activity and also had several student workers acting as messengers, recorders of results, greeters, etc. Some of these students were library employees, while others were from WMU's orientation office.

We started the evening with an icebreaker to get the students interacting. As they arrived, each student was given a card with a Library of Congress call number so that they could arrange themselves in order around our atrium entrance hall. We deliberately did not define a starting point or explain Library of Congress classification; instead, we left this for the students to figure out for themselves in part to encourage them to start talking with one another.

After a short welcome and introduction by a librarian, who emphasized working together and asking for help, the participants 'counted off' into eight teams. Everyone was given a schedule and a modified library map to show the location of the challenges, which were distributed on all floors of the library. In two hours, the students participated in four activities, and, in the final half hour, everyone gathered together for awards, snacks, and conversation.

The activities included worksheets and handouts, which are included in the Appendix. *Artifacts of the Elders* was created by the director of Archives and Regional History Collections to introduce the students to archival and special collections held by the library and to show that libraries contain more than just books and periodicals. Students examined assorted memorabilia and "rare artifacts" from the WMU archives to

answer a series of questions and unravel a cryptogram. Questions included such things as the cost of tuition in 1913 and rules for female students in the 1940s and 1950s.

*Battle of the Search Engines* introduced students to a library database so that they could compare its results with Google. The teams were asked to find and print the first page of fourteen different kinds of sources (magazine article, statistical table, advertisement, etc.) on a specified topic. For the first ten minutes, they used Google, and then for the last ten minutes they repeated the process using the ABI/INFORM library index.

*The Citation Jumble and Plagiarism Puzzle* explored two key elements of assembling a research report. The students were given a book, a journal article, a newspaper article, and a print-out of a Web site, and they were asked to format citations for these using a handout about APA style. The elements of these citations had been printed on large cards, split apart and jumbled together. *The Plagiarism Puzzle* was a series of questions from a plagiarism tutorial created by librarians at the University of Maine at Farmington.

In the *Go for the Gold* challenge, students competed to see which team could find and retrieve the most library items from a list in a specified time. They were first given a library map and brief lesson on how to use the library catalog. Each team had a different list of materials that were located on all four floors of the library. The items included a reference book and a current journal, as well as books with provocative titles, such as *What Einstein Told his Barber* and *Bus 9 to Paradise*. For one answer, they needed to use a huge lighted world globe. One group left a large pile of shoes at the reference desk, shed in their efforts to move faster!

These challenges had both social and educational purposes. They encouraged students to work together as a team and divide up tasks to complete them most efficiently. The games familiarized students with the types of resources available in an academic library and with some of the challenges of research. They also showed the advantages of asking for help or talking over alternatives with the library staff.

At the end of each timed period, the librarians who were assigned to each challenge calculated the scores accumulated by the competing teams and passed them (via a student runner) to a centralized score board. At the end of all the challenges, everyone gathered for snacks and an award ceremony with prizes. The levels of fun and excitement experienced by both the students and staff are rarely seen in the daily routine of the library.

### **Evaluation**

The forty-two participants on the second night were asked to fill out an evaluation form that asked three questions:

- What did you like most about this evening's library event?
- What two things did you learn from the event?
- Do you have any suggestions for improving this event?

*What students liked most about the library event.* Several students reported that meeting and interacting with other students (twelve responses) and teamwork (five responses) were the elements of the evening that they most enjoyed. Eight students singled out *The Artifacts of the Elders*, and indicated that they had enjoyed unscrambling the clues and the intellectual challenge of that event. Two students indicated they liked

*Go for the Gold* most and others also commented that it was fun to take off their shoes and run around the library.

*What students learned from the event.* Each student was asked to identify two things they had learned from the evening's activities. Eighteen responses referred to how the library was organized, how to use the library catalog, or to find call numbers. Eight responses indicated that students had increased their knowledge and understanding about plagiarism. Seven responses identified specific aspects of WMU history that students had uncovered through *Artifacts of the Elders*. Five responses identified searching Google and library databases, although this comparison was generally unfavorable to library databases compared with the ease of using Google. Other comments included more general aspects of working together as a team.

*Student suggestions for improvement.* Six of the respondents could not think of any improvements and simply gave positive endorsements of the evening. Six others said that they would have liked more time both in and between the events. We had set up a competitive, fast-action game style for the evening in an attempt to better engage the students in the activities and introduce a playful element that we hoped would resonate with this generation. However, several comments indicated that this format made at least some students feel rushed and harried. Some suggested that we might include some more relaxed or right-brained activities as a break from such focused, competitive tasks. Certain students and teams took the outcome of the competition much more seriously than we did and were keen to win. Some complained about unequal team numbers in their suggestions for improvement even though all teams were awarded prizes. In retrospect, the students' perspective was understandable given that they were on campus,

competing with one another for scholarships (although our library event would not factor into that decision).

*Recruitment Outcomes.* After the two nights, we had a list of 56 names of attendees. Of this list, 34 students (60.7%) enrolled at WMU in fall 2005. Unfortunately, we are unable to compare this number to the enrollment outcome of students competing for the scholarship who did not attend the library event because that aggregate data was not compiled. However, the office of admissions gave us a ballpark figure of 50% enrollment by scholarship hopefuls from previous years. In addition to the written student evaluations, we also received enthusiastic, positive feedback about our event from the admissions staff, and from teaching faculty involved with other aspects of the scholarship program. Anecdotally, 3 of the students who attended the program (8% of those who enrolled) applied for jobs in the libraries once they came to campus; we see this as another positive result of the program.

## **Discussion**

After both nights of the program were completed, staff who participated met to debrief and discuss how we might improve on some of the activities and logistics for the future. It was the consensus of the group that the event was a huge success. Generally the challenges worked out most successfully when the student team strategized and subdivided the required tasks. This team effectiveness developed during the evening as the students became better acquainted so that by the end of the evening each team was performing better than they were at the start regardless of the particular challenge in which they were engaged.

Although we provided worksheets for the challenges (see Appendix), we did not script the verbal directions that we gave to the students at the start of each challenge. In retrospect, scripted directions would have been helpful, especially as time was limited. Sometimes students were confused about what the task required. Although we deliberately wanted to present some problem-solving to the students, we should have closely scripted our verbal instructions to minimize any unnecessary vagueness.

The challenges and staffing as described worked fine for two nights, but scaling up such an event for more students would need careful consideration. Hosting the event required a lot of preparation and manpower, and mismatches between the number of students who informed the orientation office they would attend and those who actually showed up required last minute adjustments and resulted in uneven team sizes. An increase in the number of students would almost certainly result in more logistical and time problems.

The *Artifacts of the Elders* challenge captured the imagination of most of the students who seemed to enjoy handling the materials and finding out about students of a bygone era. In retrospect, the final part of the challenge (a succession of clues to sources and locations within the library) was probably an unnecessary addition to the main thrust of the challenge that included solving the initial cryptogram. However, when we devised all the challenges, we deliberately erred on the side of having too much rather than too little content for the allotted time. We did not want the students to gain the impression that college would be disappointingly unchallenging!

Several of the students commented negatively about using library databases compared with Google. Most, if not all, were familiar with Google, but probably none of

them had prior experience with ABI/INFORM. The challenge did not allow time to explain the features of the ABI search interface, and the attempt to have students learn more through discovery lost out to the students' race against the clock. They seemed to feel that they could not take time to explore ABI's features. Instead, most participants put all of their search terms on one line (Google style), ignoring the ABI search features and the results breakdown. Not surprisingly, the students had difficulties finding trade and scholarly journal articles because they did not understand fully what those things were. Interestingly, on one of the evenings, our printing system went down. As a result, each team was assigned a librarian who accepted or rejected the sources that team members pulled up. This provided opportunities for discussion and helping the students with these issues, and was perhaps a more effective teaching approach. An alternative possibility might have been to first demonstrate how easy it is to find various types of items using ABI/INFORM's features, and then ask the students to find these types of items using Google.

The *Citation Jumble* exercise was simple enough, if anything perhaps too simple. The organizers rather wished they had added a few extraneous irrelevant citation elements into the jumble. However, the *Plagiarism Puzzle* questions were generally considered too complex for this group and should be revised for a future event of this type. Though plagiarism is sometimes hard to define, if the point was to educate incoming students about the basics of plagiarism, perhaps we should have used more straightforward examples. None of the teams answered all the plagiarism questions correctly and most required significant help. Nevertheless, the exercise did result in



opportunities for dialogue and discussion between the librarians who were running that event and the students engaged in it.

The *Go for the Gold* activity worked well in that it familiarized the students with the basic use of our catalog and how to locate items from the call number. The hardest part was creating the lists of interesting titles. Before the evening started, we made sure each item was on the shelf, as we did not intend to teach them about missing and misshelved books at this time. One thing to consider, if hosting such a challenge, is how much prior instruction is needed on the use of the library catalog.

## **Conclusion**

Although time consuming and labor intensive, participation in this project proved to have several advantages for us. First, and perhaps most importantly, it gave us a rare opportunity to connect with other departments on campus with which we otherwise have little interaction. Part of our struggle in the academic environment is to build relationships across campus in order to improve the visibility of the library and make known all we have to offer our various constituencies. This was an invaluable opportunity for librarians to work with other WMU employees and introduce them to our resources, services, and staff. Six months after the successful Medallion program, the university administration asked the library to take the lead in organizing and coordinating a two day Fall orientation program for incoming faculty new to WMU. This provided a tremendous opportunity to establish relationships between each new faculty member and their respective library liaison, and to showcase the various resources and services that the library offers.

Second, our participation in this project influenced the way many of us conduct library instruction sessions. Some librarians have reported that their major goals for instruction sessions have altered. Instead of cramming a laundry list of points into a fifty minute session, they focus instead on major skills and content, on reducing library anxiety, and encouraging students to seek follow up assistance. A few librarians have incorporated elements from the Medallion activities into regular classes, sometimes in a modified form. The Go for the Gold exercise was used for training new student library workers while the cryptogram element was used with some student orientation leaders.

Finally, many of the library staff involved with the Medallion event experienced increased enthusiasm about their role in the library and the libraries' role on campus. Many librarians and library staff really seized this opportunity to do something different that would have a positive impact for the students and for the profile of the library. While planning and conducting the event, we experienced a renewed "esprit de corps". Our normal working roles and boundaries were changed enabling new opportunities for dialog and cooperation. This helped provide some real impetus to a library-wide strategic planning initiative that the library had embarked on. Library members were able to share ideas and optimism more openly as a result of the new alliances that had been forged. The energy of the students seemed to be contagious as well. Their enthusiasm and their evaluations showed that they enjoyed being in the library. They also gained confidence and a sense of achievement in meeting the challenges posed. As a result, we feel that our goals for this program were successfully accomplished.

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# APPENDIX

## *Artifacts of the Elders*

Artifacts from our past give us a small glimpse into how things once were. Sometimes these artifacts have obvious and profound meaning, yet others contain secrets that remain hidden for centuries. Over time humankind has developed many ways to leave clues to their heirs. This challenge asks you to find clues in historical artifacts and documents. These clues will lead you to other clues that will help you to unlock the history of Western Michigan University and knowledge itself.

Members of the group should examine the artifacts and try to answer the following questions:

A. What was the cost of tuition in 1913?

T  $\frac{\quad}{6}$   $\frac{\quad}{3}$   $\frac{\quad}{10}$

B. What types of rules existed for female students at Western in the 1940s and 1950s?

D  $\frac{\quad}{5}$   $\frac{\quad}{11}$  d  $\frac{\quad}{\quad}$

C. What type of packaging did the students use in 1967 for their literary magazine Calliope?

C  $\frac{\quad}{\quad}$  of  $\frac{\quad}{7}$  u  $\frac{\quad}{\quad}$

D. What international events occurred in 1944 and how did it affect the campus?

M  $\frac{\quad}{8}$  y  $\frac{\quad}{4}$  n

E. "It's the extra drive that wins" refers to what?

C  $\frac{\quad}{12}$

F. What are the secrets of Western Michigan University's seal? What does the pyramid signify?

$\frac{\quad}{2}$  n  $\frac{\quad}{1}$

G. What does the tree signify?

$\frac{\quad}{9}$  r  $\frac{\quad}{\quad}$

(Fill in your answers and then fill in the numbered answer key below to reveal your first clue. Unscramble the answer to reveal your next clue and so on. Good luck.)

$\frac{\quad}{1}$   $\frac{\quad}{2}$   $\frac{\quad}{3}$   $\frac{\quad}{4}$   $\frac{\quad}{5}$   $\frac{\quad}{6}$   $\frac{\quad}{7}$   $\frac{\quad}{8}$   $\frac{\quad}{9}$   $\frac{\quad}{10}$   $\frac{\quad}{11}$   $\frac{\quad}{12}$  ?

## ***Battle of the Search Engines***

### **Round 1:**

Searching with **Google**, each team has 8 minutes to find as many of the items as it can on the list below.

When you find one of the items below, print out the first (or relevant) page as proof. Then ***immediately*** get the page and write what item number it is. *Pages left unattended on the printer may be stolen by a librarian!*

You need a **different** source for each of the 14 items.

**Stop when Time is called**, or shout out “**Completed**” when the team has a numbered page for each of the 14 items.

You need to find information about **employment of college graduates**. Specifically you must find the following types of information:

1. Magazine article
2. Source within the last 6 months
3. Source that focuses on Michigan
4. Trade or professional publication (written for a profession or practitioners rather than general public)
5. An academic article (a scholarly examination of the issues involved, generally with references to previous studies)
6. Statistical table
7. Advertising or commercial announcement
8. Newspaper article
9. Source that focuses on minorities
10. Source older than 1995
11. A chart or graph
12. Review of a book about this topic
13. Source that focuses on small businesses
14. An item with the words **college graduates** and **employment** in its title

**Round 2:** The same as Round 1, but searching with **ABI/INFORM Global** database.

## ***Citation Jumble***

The following items were given to the students. All the pieces of the citations (between slash marks) were provided on large laminated cards and the students had to organize them into an APA style citation for each item.

### **A book:**

Clinton, Bill / (2004). / *My Life*. / New York, NY: / Alfred A. Knopf.

### **A newspaper article:**

Davey, Monica. / (2004, October 27). / Where to catch a rising political star. / *The New York Times*, / pp. A12.

### **A magazine article:**

Volek, J. Van Heest, J. & Forsythe, C. / (2005) / Diet and exercise for weight loss: A review of current issues. / *Sports Medicine*, / 35: 1-9.

### **A Web site:**

Menoe, Rajan. (2005, January & February 4). / What went wrong. / *Boston Review* / <http://bostonreview.net/BR29.6/menon.html>

## ***Plagiarism Puzzle***

A few of the questions from the University of Maine at Farmington's interactive game on plagiarism at [http://plagiarism.umf.maine.edu/is\\_it.html](http://plagiarism.umf.maine.edu/is_it.html)

### **Is it plagiarism?**

1. You write a paper on the legalization of marijuana for your high school Current Events class. You save that paper and hand it in to satisfy the persuasive paper requirement in your English Composition 100F class here at UMF. Is it plagiarism?
2. You are working on a computer slide show presentation for your literature class. You want to make the point that Shakespeare's works have been plagiarized throughout the centuries. You capture a painting of Shakespeare from the Web for your first slide. Is it plagiarism?
3. In your computer slide show presentation about Shakespeare's works, you include a snippet of famous dialogue from *Romeo and Juliet*. Is it plagiarism?
4. You decide the best way to get across your point about Shakespeare's works being plagiarized is to show some examples. You include a video clip from the film *West Side Story* in your presentation. Is it plagiarism?

## ***Go for the Gold!***

It's up to your team to figure out how to complete this challenge. You can do it in any way you want. This challenge asks you to find books and magazines and bring them back to the circulation desk. Remember, you can ASK a librarian if you can't figure something out. Just look for someone wearing a blue shirt.

### **Hints:**

- You'll find the call numbers for the books and magazines listed below in the library catalog.
- A bookmark and map will help you locate them in the library.

### **How many of the items below can your group find in 20 minutes?**

1. Chocolate: Cooking With the World's Best Ingredient by Christine McFadden
2. A recent copy of the magazine *Journal of Peasant Studies* (look for Current issues)
3. Brazil: A Country Study ed. by Rex A. Huson
4. Tabloid Culture by Kevin Glynn
5. Angels and Amazons by Inez Hayes Irwin
6. G Factor: The Science of Mental Ability by Arthur R. Jensen
7. How many books by John Grisham does the library own? \_\_\_\_
8. Bring back a copy of his book Pelican Brief
9. Find a title of a book or the name of an author with your color in it.

\_\_\_\_\_

### **Using the globe on the First Floor, answer the following question:**

10. What is the northernmost town in the United States? \_\_\_\_\_