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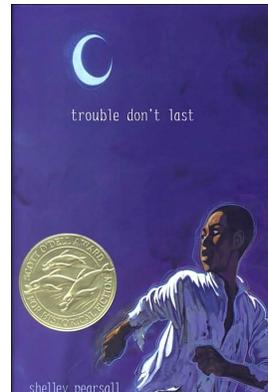
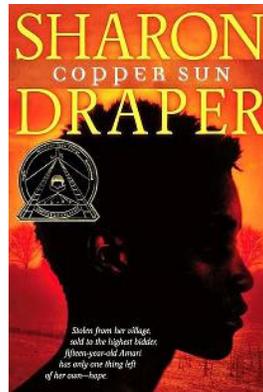
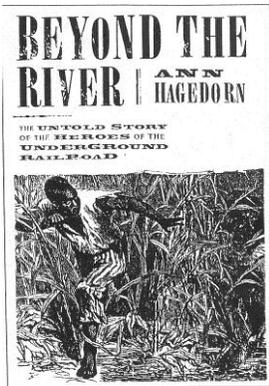
Cardington Reads!

How a single project can foster integration and collaboration, build partnerships, promote reading, and encourage awareness of local history

By Katie Porteus, School Librarian
[Cardington-Lincoln Local Schools](#)



As a school librarian in a small school district with ever-diminishing resources, I always have an eye out for opportunities to stretch a dollar. Furthermore, as our local public library suffers similar crippling budget cuts, it seemed like a no-brainer for the school and public libraries to pool our resources. So when Jennifer Reis, then the youth services librarian, and Lisa Ebert, the adult services librarian at [Cardington-Lincoln Public Library](#), contacted me about collaboration on an LSTA [Choose to Read Ohio grant](#), I jumped at the chance. The primary objective of the [Choose to Read Ohio](#) initiative is to encourage community-wide reading of designated titles by Ohio authors. Beyond that, I saw this as an opportunity for cross-curricular learning for the students of Cardington-Lincoln Junior High.



The book choices for the 2009-2010 school year included three titles which centered around the Underground Railroad. Since the eighth grade social studies teacher had expressed an interest in incorporating a novel into her curriculum, this seemed like the perfect opportunity. We selected three titles to include in our grant proposal: [Beyond the River: a True Story of the Underground Railroad](#) by Ann Hagedorn, which would be offered to the adult reading group, [Copper Sun](#) by Sharon Draper, which would be included in the eighth grade social studies classes, and [Trouble Don't Last](#) by Shelley Pearsall, which would be incorporated into the seventh grade reading classes. Since our objective was to include the entire community, we began investigating ways to extend the theme of the Underground Railroad throughout the school, as well as the entire town. I appealed to the teachers for ideas.

The first contributor was the junior high and high school music teacher, Sarah Hickman. I knew Sarah to be well-versed in the music of the Underground Railroad, and so she offered to prepare a group of eighth grade singers for a program at our local public library. Besides the actual music, she prepared a short narrative about how the songs were used to direct escaping slaves to safe houses and to freedom, as

well as information on our community's role in the Underground Railroad. The performance was given on an evening that ended up with multiple conflicts within the community, so we were not optimistic about community participation. Imagine our surprise when we had over forty guests in our audience. It was literally standing room only!

Next, the art teacher, Kristi Alexander, offered to incorporate a quilting unit into the junior high classes, along with a display of the students' quilts to be featured at the school during the spring musical. The students were taught how the signs and symbols of the quilts were thought to represent codes to escaping slaves. The spring musical was well attended by the community, with lots of positive feedback about the artwork.

Patrick Drouhard, the superintendent of Cardington-Lincoln School District at the time, offered to contribute as well. As an avid history buff, he had prepared a carefully researched performance of a local Civil War soldier, Robert Long: a Soldier's Story. While our audience was not quite as large as with the student performance, we still welcomed approximately thirty guests into the public library that evening.

Diana McClure, the eighth grade social studies teacher, incorporated Copper Sun into her students' required reading. We were able to purchase 100 paperbacks for students' use. While the students naturally complained about having to read a novel for social studies, most became enthralled in the story of a young African woman forced into slavery. As the school's librarian, I was able to capitalize on this interest and introduce them to other titles by Ohio author Sharon Draper. What a terrific opportunity for students in a non-racially diverse rural community to read about young people of color!

We also purchased 100 copies of Trouble Don't Last, which our seventh grade reading teachers incorporated into their classes. The units were topped off by a visit from the Marion Historical Society, with an overview of local involvement in the Underground Railroad. Specific stations in both Marion and Morrow Counties were explored.

The only disappointment was the lack of enthusiasm for the adult selection Beyond the River: a True Story of the Underground Railroad. While an engrossing look at Ohio's Abolitionists' role in the Underground Railroad, with a special focus on the Ohio River at Ripley, Ohio, the nonfiction selection may have been too academic for leisure reading. Our book discussion at the public library was not well-attended.

Despite this very minor setback, the project was a success. All of our intended outcomes were met, as well as some unexpected benefits. The partnership between school and public library, as well as the cross-curricular nature of the unit, helped to bring history to life for Cardington's students as well as for the community.