

So Many E-books, So Little Time

By Tim Wiles, Library Director

You just can't curl up with an e-book—or can you?" While print books continue to be a solid mainstay -- 65 percent of readers nationwide prefer them, according to a September 2019 article by the Pew Research Center -- the popularity of digital books has rapidly increased. Two years ago, I was stunned to see a 23% increase in ebook usage here at GPL. Then last year, there was a jaw-dropping 58% increase in the use of ebooks. This figure mirrors universal trends reported by CNBC in September 2019. This doesn't mean there is a corresponding drop in the use of print books here at the library, just that lots of people are into ebooks.

Maybe you didn't realize that your library offers e-books and magazines? If so, go to this page on our website for an easy summary of how to access these materials:

<https://guilderlandlibrary.org/read-view-listen/downloadable-materials/>. In short, you'll use Libby for ebooks and e-audiobooks, Flipster to page through popular magazines, and Tumblebooks for access to children's books. All of those resources are available on our webpage or on your phone or tablet, at no charge.

The beauty of checking out an e-book (or magazine) is that you don't actually have to come to the library to obtain your items. Convenience is king as library cardholders simply download their literary selections onto their smartphones, tablets, and e-readers. We also lend digital audiobooks, tailor-made for commuters. If you would like assistance getting established, we hold 1:1 eBook office hours most Wednesdays at 2 p.m. If you can't make that day or time, we're happy to work with your schedule to make an appointment. Simply give us a call.

But there is a bit of a catch—ebooks are so popular that libraries are having trouble keeping up with the demand, and publishers are not making it easier, often charging libraries more for an ebook than they charge consumers, and limiting the number of times e-books can be borrowed. Throughout the Upper Hudson library System, which serves public library users in Albany and Rensselaer counties, if you place a hold on a printed book—because all the copies are already checked out, you will get your book, on average, in 7 days. But for ebooks, the wait time fluctuates between 35 and 40 days.

Under U.S. law, libraries (and individuals who buy books) generally have the right to lend out their physical books as long and as often as they choose, with no additional payments to the author or the publisher. Publishers dictate the terms under which e-books can be lent out, which can vary widely. Many offered by major publishers come with licensing agreements that require each virtual copy to be essentially purchased anew after they've been lent out a certain number of times—26 lends is quite common—or after a certain amount of time has elapsed.

This leads us to the flipside of e-books. For libraries as well as individuals, it can be a challenge to own and lend a digital book. Ordinarily, libraries might buy multiple digital copies of an expected bestseller. But for public libraries on limited budgets, some restrictive licensing agreements are forcing careful selection on what we can reasonably offer to the public. As a

result, library users may find the excellent free resource of e-books impacted by agreements and industry policies outside of libraries' control.

Case in point: publishing giant Macmillan announced that starting November 1, library systems will only be able to purchase a single digital copy for the first eight weeks of circulation. This cap applies equally to smaller single-location libraries and sprawling multi-branch systems, so that only a tiny fraction of readers would win the lottery, so to speak, and be able to borrow that digital book fresh from the publisher.

Macmillan's decision drew criticism from major libraries and the American Library Association, which launched an online petition (<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/ebooksforall-petitionurging>) urging Macmillan not to implement this restrictive policy. So far, it's drawn more than 149,000 signatures, to no avail as of this writing. The large library system in King County, Oregon is taking this a step further, boycotting Macmillan ebooks all together.

All of this makes e-book lending a more complicated proposition for libraries. While we strive to meet consumer demand, we need to carefully determine what's worth purchasing, given these constraints, while also maintaining the still-popular print collection. It becomes a balancing act, which could also impact newer authors seeking exposure.

What's the solution to this copyright conundrum? One possibility could be for Congress to create a standard royalty system for lending out e-books. Right now, it's unclear what the demand would be for such a change, but as more lenders become negatively impacted, calls for reform could grow louder. This type of proposed legislation would be a first in the United States, but perhaps the time has come for serious consideration.

The bottom line is, we are proud to serve as a valuable community resource for Guilderland and the greater Capital District, where anyone can access books and other media free of charge. As libraries like ours continue increase the availability of media governed by the fine print of licensing agreements, we will continue to do all we can to put as many of these materials into your hands as possible.

Here's a related new development that we are excited to announce: your Guilderland Library card now grants you access to eBooks and downloadable audiobooks in many different languages! We've added over 1,500 titles to Overdrive across the top non-English languages spoken by our patrons—which we determined by consulting the Guilderland Central School District. You can visit <https://uhls.overdrive.com> and log in with your Guilderland library card number to get full access to these titles and more. A partial list of the languages includes Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, Telugu, Turkish, and Spanish.

Help Wanted: Guilderland Public Library is currently seeking to fill a vacancy—we need a Treasurer. The position involves reviewing financial documentation related to library operations and submitting a report at monthly board meetings. The time commitment is roughly four hours per month. This is an ideal position for a retiree who wishes to remain active

in their profession and the community, or for a young financial professional looking to build their resume. Interested candidates with financial expertise are encouraged to contact Board President Bryan Best at: 518.265.4432 or bryanbest1@gmail.com. We are also seeking a part-time custodian, 20 hours per week at a rate of \$14.56 per hour. Please see <https://guilderlandlibrary.org/get-to-know-us/people/careers-help-wanted/> for further details

Bus Trip to New York City: Saturday, December 7. We're collaborating with the Guilderland Chamber of Commerce once again to offer a holiday-season excursion to midtown Manhattan. We'll leave Farnsworth Middle School at 7 a.m.; make one rest stop and arrive near Bryant Park and the awesome New York Public Library at approximately 10 a.m. for a day on your own in the Big Apple. We'll leave at 7 p.m. for the trip home, arriving at 10 p.m. Cost is \$50 per person. See www.guilderlandlibrary.org/nyc and click on the "purchase tickets here" link to reserve your spot before it sells out!