

# SLQ CATCHES YOUNG READERS WITH DESIGN WORKSHOPS

The *Cover Up* program has been running as a school holiday workshop at the State Library of Queensland each year since its inception in 2007. *Cover Up* targets younger readers from age eight to 14, with the objective being to interest people in this age group in the sort of resources and services offered by a state library through the experience of a workshop. The critical take-home message is that the library is an interesting and friendly place where young people can expect to find useful resources and staff at the reference desk who are ready to offer their assistance.

The *Cover Up* program runs as a half day workshop ostensibly focusing on book cover design. Participants are asked to choose a topic of interest and then a reference book which corresponds to the relevant subject area. At this point they are encouraged to seek assistance from the information desk in finding a book on their chosen topic. They are also offered the option of searching the shelves independently with a specially created Dewey Decimal subject guide.

Participants browse their book of choice to gather ideas for the design of the cover and return to the workshop room where some principles of book cover design are discussed. They then embark on the creative effort of designing a book cover, an extended activity which takes up the major

lease of life as attractive, interesting and important titles which readily reveal their essential purpose.

*Cover Up* has seen a number of changes in the four years it has been offered. We have experimented with running it over a six day period, during different holiday periods and on different days of the week. The program is run on a cost recovery basis and cost established for the most recent workshop was \$10 per participant though it has varied in previous years from free to \$12. We have changed the original nine to 16 target group to eight to 14 and found this to be the ideal age group in terms of participant interest level and ability to participate in workshop activities. In response to comments from participants we have also expanded the selection of workshop materials offered in the workshop.

Feedback is very important and we draw on it to promote the workshop in the following year and to look critically at how we manage and plan for each event. It comes from a variety of sources and includes some worthwhile suggestions, however feedback received from the workshop participants themselves has generally concentrated on their enjoyment of the experience:

"I went to *Cover Up* and it was very fun."

"Creative and cool."

"It's really fun and you can do what you like, it's very individual."

"It was awesome."

"It is a great workshop and heaps, heaps, heaps of fun!!"



part of the workshop. When, at the end of the session, the covers are united with their books, the technique employed ensures that there is no risk of damage to the book's original cover.

The final task is to place the covered book on the library display shelves where it becomes part of a special workshop exhibition. In the weeks following the event, family members and friends visit the library to view the *Cover Up* display. This display, because it gives young designers a stake in their state library, is an effective way of extending the impact of the workshop experience and capitalises on the wider interest generated in the library as a destination. The covers also attract a significant amount of interest from the visiting public, largely because of their inventiveness and appealing design elements.

During the talk about the principles of book cover design, group members are challenged to be creative. They are asked how, as designers, they will make their book stand out on the shelves, how they will make it say "Hey! Over here! Read me!". Their task is not simply to draw attention to the cover but to also to provide information about the contents of the book to a prospective reader.

Interestingly, what typically emerges out of this initial challenge is an impressive transformation – in that plain, rather serious looking reference works are given a new

Feedback also informs the debriefings we hold after each workshop. At these meetings staff make recommendations about the running of the next workshop which are based on their observation and on the feedback of participants and their carers.

*Cover Up* is a challenging workshop in that it has to do much more than entertain the participants for half a day. Its point is to connect younger readers with the library's resources, its services and its collections. While the participants explore the art of book cover design and create a new cover for one of our books, they also learn how to locate books on the shelves, extract information from their book of choice and navigate the physical spaces of the library. They learn about the information desk and meet staff who are welcoming and helpful. The idea is that the learning aspect happens in an enjoyable way, that is, without the participants even realising that there is another aspect to the workshop.

**Nathaniel Cliff**  
nathaniel.cliff@slq.qld.gov.au

**Elizabeth Fielding**  
elizabeth.fielding@slq.qld.gov.au  
State Library of Queensland