

AT THE INTERSECTION OF DOG AND LIBRARY

Dog St
Library Ave

DOGS AS STRESS THERAPY



Figure 8. Monty, the stress therapy dog at Yale Law School Library. Photo from *Yale Daily News*.

Because academic libraries have always been oriented towards facilitating learning, it makes sense that they are among the first libraries to turn towards dogs as stress therapy. Chanen (2011) reports that Monty, a Jack Russell-border terrier mix, will be a permanent staff member at Yale's Goldman Law Library after a successful trial program in the spring of 2011 in which the library "checked out" Monty to law students during finals for stress therapy. The scientific research on mental and physiological health benefits from playing with dogs is extensive (Reynolds & Rabshultz, 2011). More than with reading dog programs, these stress therapy dog programs seem to lie beyond the scope of traditional conceptions of libraries. While reading dog programs contribute to libraries' long-held values of promoting literacy for children, therapy dogs are neither oriented towards literacy nor towards other aspects of information access. However, what stress therapy dogs provide is a service that addresses the needs of the patron as a whole. In the environment of high-stress academia, particularly during semester-end final exams, the technology of dogs helps indirectly to address young adults' ability to learn and create knowledge.

CONCLUSION

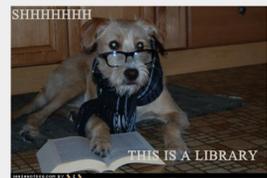


Figure 9. Dog librarian. Captioned image from *I Has a Holdog*.

In light of the proliferation of discussions about digital and machine technologies as the future of libraries, librarians would do well to think about other ways to facilitate the creation of knowledge and to create a unique space for libraries in the public mind that is rooted in the physical world. Dogs, in all their furry, fun-loving presence, are one such way to make sure libraries stay relevant in the future. The dogs that terrorize the librarian in Mark Strand's poem, then, might be seen less as a danger to the quiet order of libraries and more as an invitation to play and recreate the library in a new mold.

Future research into the efficacy of literacy dog programs will help determine the extent to which libraries should invest in them. Librarians might also explore other possibilities for incorporating dogs into libraries to facilitate the creation of knowledge in their communities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



Figure 10. Giles reads a book.

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LITERACY DOGS



Figure 4. Reading Education Assistance Dogs (R.E.A.D.) program logo.

BENEFITS FOR CHILDREN

- + Improve children's reading skills.
- + Encourages reading aloud.
- + Reduces anxiety about reading and reading aloud.
- + Increases association of reading with pleasure and fun.

BENEFITS FOR ALL

- + Involves dogs and their humans in the library community.
- + Gives dogs a sense of purpose with training and work.
- + Helps assuage fear of dogs in controlled environment with trained dogs.
- + Reduces stress generally and increases feelings of wellbeing.



Figure 5. Photos from the R.E.A.D. program. Retrieved from http://www.therapyanimals.org/Read_Photos.html

A number of public libraries across the country have introduced reading programs with dog assistants, including four branches of the Saint Paul Public Library (2011) with its Paw Pals program. Reading Education Assistance Dogs (R.E.A.D.) certification, designed by Intermountain Therapy Dogs (2011), is the most popular training program for reading therapy dogs. The library science literature includes many mentions of dog reading programs across the country, often including descriptions of what happens in a reading session as well as instructions for establishing programs and ensuring proper certification for all dog handler and dog teams. The general setup for most programs is to have a trained therapy dog and the dog's handler alone in the room with a child. The child, with the aid of a librarian, chooses a book to read out loud to the dog. The dog lies next to the child, and the child often pets the dog as she reads.



Figure 6. Screenshot of Paw Pals events at Saint Paul Public Library website.

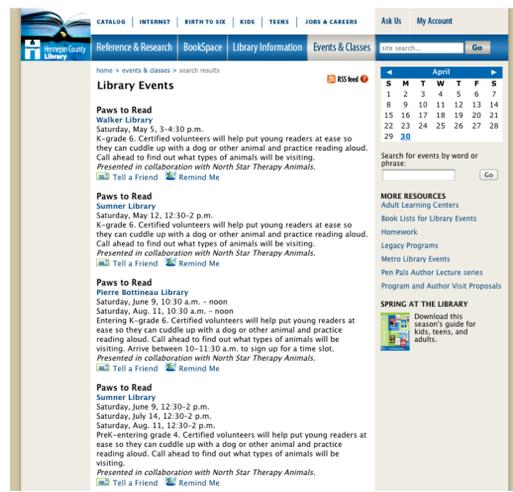


Figure 7. Screenshot of Paws for Reading events at Hennepin County Library website.

Eating Poetry By Mark Strand



Figure 1. My dog Giles watches me read (or covets my cookies).

Ink runs from the corners of my mouth.
There is no happiness like mine.
I have been eating poetry.

The librarian does not believe what she sees.
Her eyes are sad
and she walks with her hands in her dress.

The poems are gone.
The light is dim.
The dogs are on the basement stairs and coming up.

Their eyeballs roll,
their blond legs burn like brush.
The poor librarian begins to stamp her feet and weep.

She does not understand.
When I get on my knees and lick her hand,
she screams.

I am a new man.
I snarl at her and bark.
I romp with joy in the bookish dark.



Figure 2. The dog and the Dickens. Captioned image from *I Has a Holdog*.

INTRODUCTION

Mark Strand's provocative poem pits the messy, carnal pleasures of poetry against the staid, easily-disturbed librarian. The desires of poetry incapacitate the poor librarian's need for order, and the vehicle for undoing the librarian's equilibrium is the dog. Given this characterization of antagonistic relationships between poetry, librarians, and dogs, what place does a dog have in the library?

Considering the place of dogs in libraries not only reminds librarians to think about the physical and nondigital aspects of library members' experiences with reading and information access but also suggests an alternative perspective on technology. Instead of understanding technology only as digital and machine-based, seeing dogs as technology emphasizes the instrumental quality of technology and focuses attention on what ends might be achieved in their use. In the case of dogs, librarians have begun to bring dogs into libraries for two major purposes—to encourage reading for young children and to offer stress relief for college students. Both of these purposes reflect a sense of community-building at the heart of librarianship. Furthermore, both reflect a trend towards thinking of librarianship as a broader practice of facilitating learning rather than as solely the practice of delivering services and access to collections.



Figure 3. "We're going to the one place that could have the answer." Screenshot of Tintin and Snowy at the library in the 2011 film *The Adventures of Tintin*.

LIMITATIONS

Although dogs like Snowy in the computer animated film *The Adventures of Tintin* (2011; see Figure 3) are more than able to help humans read in the library, there are potential issues with bringing dogs into the library environment in the real world.

- Some library community members have allergies to dogs.
- Some members are afraid of dogs.
- Dogs introduce potential liability issues for libraries.

Furthermore, if libraries were to bring in dogs in more widespread and systematic ways, librarians would need to consider standardized training for literacy dogs, assess the usefulness of literacy dog programs in more sustained ways, and calculate the costs of making programs more rigorous (perhaps paying human and dog volunteers as staff).

