

Competencies for Librarians Serving Children in Public Libraries

(<https://www.alsc.ala.org/blog/category/competencies-for-librarians-serving-children-in-public-libraries/>)

# Tiny Triumphs: Using Ukuleles with Success in the Library

June 2, 2019 (<https://www.alsc.ala.org/blog/2019/06/tiny-triumphs-using-ukuleles-with-success-in-the-library/>) | Guest Contributor (<https://www.alsc.ala.org/blog/author/guest-contributor/>)



As a ukulele teacher, I have witnessed the power of this little instrument to change lives, and I'm thrilled to see more and more ukuleles popping up in libraries.

"It's a craze!" says Katrina (Kat) Ealy, a Massachusetts librarian. Because the uke is easy to grab, super sturdy, and simple to play, librarians who enjoy incorporating singing into story-time programs have been learning how to play it. "I try to play one song a week on the ukulele, and the kids always get really excited when they see me unzip the bag," Ealy says.

But it's not just a story-time instrument. Libraries across the country are creating popular ukulele-lending programs. After meeting a uke-loving librarian at her state library conference, Maryland librarian Tess Goldwasser bought a uke, was amazed at how easy it was to learn, and then got a grant to purchase twenty ukes to lend. So now the joy of making music is spreading throughout her county. "I believe that making music can be one of the most empowering of all human experiences," Tess says, and she believes the little uke is a great instrument for all ages.

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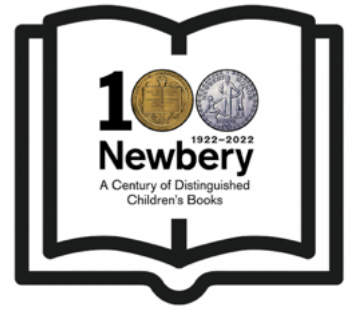
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"Our customers love checking out ukes," Eric Carzon, Library Services Manager for Montgomery County, MD, says. He notes that he and his staff worked through questions before launching a successful program to lend out six ukes, as well as some other instruments, at Twinbrook Library in Rockville, MD.

- How are we going to categorize the uke? Is it an instrument? Is it a kit?
- Are we going to put barcodes on instruments, cases, or both?
- Where/how will we store or display our ukes?
- How long can ukes be checked out? Can ukes be held? Renewed?
- Are we going to list in the catalog? How will we publicize?
- Are we going to offer programming? If so, will we connect with volunteers for this? Try to get a grant to hire a music teacher? Tap one of our own librarians who has the expertise?

At Twinbrook, a patron can check out a uke for 14 days. It comes with a soft case, an instructional booklet, and a small clip-on tuner—and none of the ukes have been damaged or destroyed yet, according to Carzon. Each uke and case are given a matching barcode. The ukes are categorized as kits and are displayed at the library, but they do not appear in the catalog system and holds cannot be placed on them. With only six ukes to offer, they don't want to get into a situation where the ukes have long waiting lists. Carzon chooses to display them instead and purchased a moveable rack for them, but notes that you could display just one and keep the circulating ukes in storage.

If you do start a lending program, consider if you'll offer anything else to support the patrons in their quest to enjoy playing. The simplest is to make sure to offer instructional and song books in your collection. In St. Mary's County, Goldwasser says their ukes circulate not only a beginner book, but also an instructional DVD. Another possibility is to offer access to online music instruction. Some library systems offer patrons free access to Artist Works, online music teaching courses, through the library account.



What else libraries offer varies widely. Some libraries partner with local musicians or a local ukulele club. To find out if your area has a uke club, check with a local music store or search on social media like Meetup. You might strike gold. In Florida, the Tampa Bay Ukulele Society (TBUS) has not only donated ukuleles to the public library system, but also conducted free workshops and strum-along sessions, all staffed by TBUS volunteers, for over 5000 attendees at over 40 libraries to date. While people are crazy about ukes, the instrument is not a fad and is so worth embracing, says TBUS President, Tom Hood. Due to popular response, the TBUS/Public Library partnership is only growing stronger. "Our mission is education, entertainment, and community service," says Hood. "Our partnership is a win-win because we provide programs and the libraries have the facilities, patrons, and promotion. Our members get the enjoyment of giving back."

And you never know what the ripple effect from the strummed strings of just one borrowed uke might be. Hood says that he has seen library patrons go from being a newbie to doing concerts for senior-citizen centers and more. Toni Steen, a California-based school librarian got hooked after borrowing a uke from her Yorba Linda public library and that led her to create a uke lending program as well as a ukulele club at her school. "My goal was to expose students to something new and get them excited about music...It has been a huge success!" says Steen.

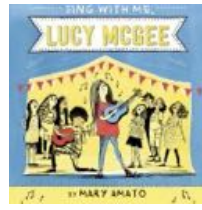
Happily, the strum goes on and on.

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A thorough resource list with links to related essays and articles, online tools, and a list of libraries that offer lending programs is available at <https://www.maryamato.com/library-and-ukulele-resources/> (<https://www.maryamato.com/library-and-ukulele-resources/>).

*(All photos courtesy of guest blogger)*

(<https://holidayhouse.com/book/sing-with-me-lucy-mcgee/>) Our guest blogger today is **Mary Amato**. Mary is an award-winning author of many books for children and young adults. As a uke-playing musician and songwriter, Mary often incorporates music into her fiction. Her latest chapter-book series, *Lucy McGee* (<https://www.maryamato.com/lucy-mcgee/>), is about a ukulele-playing fourth grader and her friends and features songs. [www.maryamato.com](http://www.maryamato.com) (<http://www.maryamato.com>).



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This post addresses the following ALSC Core Competency: Programming Skills.

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## One comment



**Libby Kisinger**

June 21, 2021 at 11:29 am (<https://www.alsc.ala.org/blog/2019/06/tiny-triumphs-using-ukueles-with-success-in-the-library/#comment-4574349>)

A great post without any doubt.

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