

# BOOKISH

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Teen Department Head Karl Schwartz showing off the library's virtual reality goggles

## SMELLS LIKE TEEN SPIRIT

New department head on the virtual and non-virtual reality of working with Hoboken's youth

The teen population is growing in Hoboken and the Library has taken note, expanding programming and other offerings for middle- and high schoolers. This includes the hiring of Teen Department Head Karl Schwartz. Though he's only been with the Hoboken Public Library for one year, he has created a dramatic impact on the lives of those knowledge-thirsty adolescents. The

former high school teacher transitioned into being a librarian, working at the Newark Public Library for almost two years. Karl, in his short time here, has created engaging educational programs that allow teens to make new friends and learn valuable social skills, which, Karl says, "makes our library so special."

### What are ways that teens can come together?

We partnered with Project U.S.E. which sent us all the supplies and instructions for an urban garden. Teens built from scratch a hydroponic garden including cutting PCP pipe and drilling holes. We have a summer volunteer program where teens sit and read to younger children and give out snacks at the Library's Picnic in the Park program. At the Library's Grand Street branch, which is on the 2nd floor of the Multi-Service Center, teens play games and do crafts with younger children. We also have a teen blog where teens write reviews of media available at the Library and the Teen Zone space in the Library's Annex building, next door at 256 5th Street.

### Why is the Teen Zone an important place for teens?

Everyone needs a third place that they can go to. For adults, their third place, after work and home, can be a coffee shop or a bar. For teens, the Teen Zone is a safe space they can go to after school instead of going home. The Library renovated the basement of this building to create two play areas, one for children called Toybrary with toys for children and the other area called Teen Zone where teens from all different schools can just hang out or play board games. The walls are decorated with artwork from a teen who donated them to the Library.

### Tell us about Oculus Virtual Reality (VR) at the Library.

First of all, it's fun to put on goggles that connect to a VR computer technology that lets you immerse yourself in a simulated 3D world. Teenagers can become gladiators and fight zombies and ogres in *Gorn* or they can use lightsabers to hit targets in 3D space to the beat of a song of their choosing in *Beat Saber* or they can participate in a cartoonish *Job Simulator* experience that includes flying paper airplanes into nearby cubicles. It's amazing to watch someone experience VR for the first time.

But another aspect is watching teens learn social skills. As they line up to use the goggles, they (*continues on next page*)

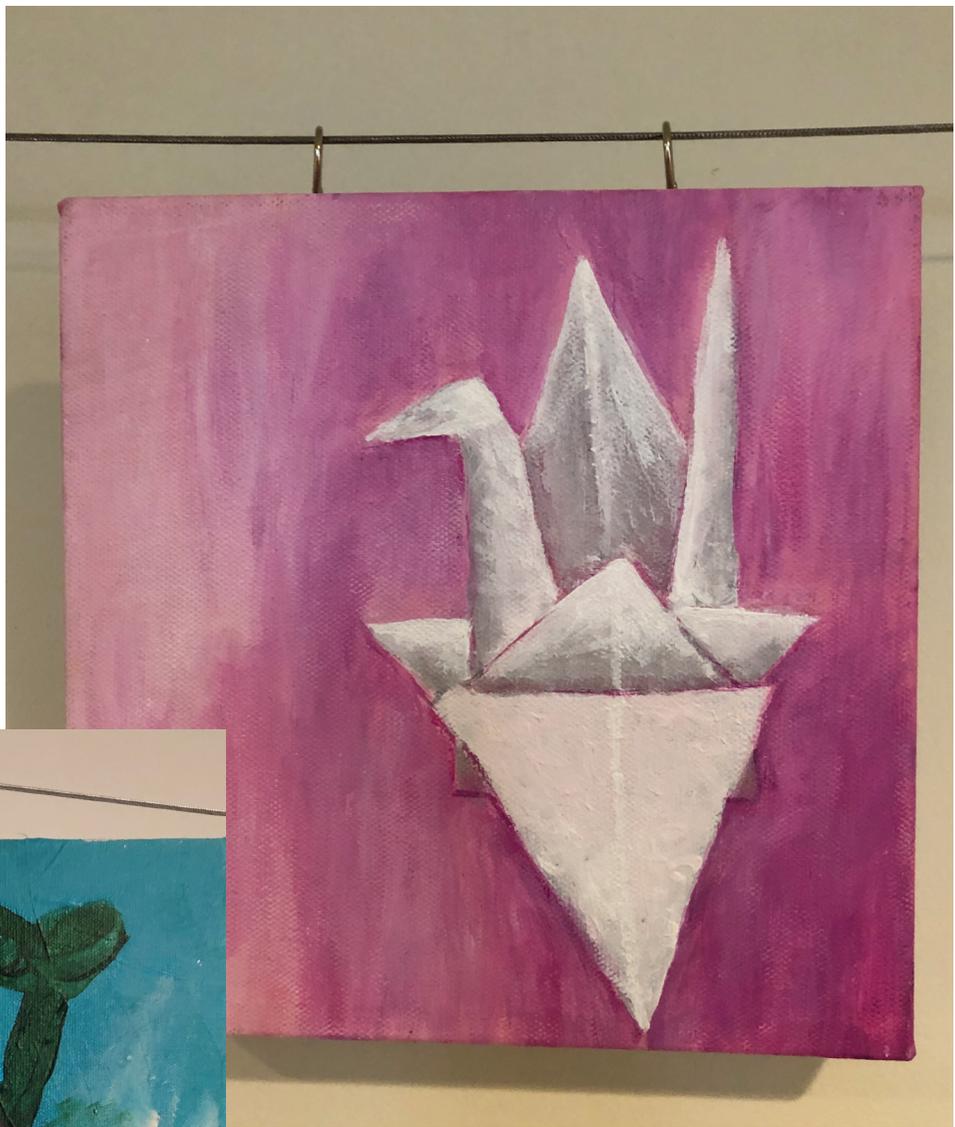
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learn how to be cooperative and naturally end up teaching kids who have never used this technology before.

**What programs do you have this fall?**

We have the Teen Advisory Board where we meet with teens in a laid-back manner to learn what programs or activities they're interested in. In October, we plan to start our 10-week Girls Who Code program, which we created for the first time in the spring. We recruit female students from Stevens Institute of Technology to teach this program because they can also share their personal experience in the value of STEM education. This program also builds camaraderie and team-building skills.

– Sylvia Schwartz



*Artwork painted by Hoboken High School student Susannah McCann, who donated them to the Library. They adorn the walls in the Toybrary and Teen Zone space at the Library's new annex building at 256 5th Street, next door to the current main branch*



## LEARN THE LINGO

Say hello, hola or bonjour to the Library's new literacy coordinator

Over 30 years ago, the newly incorporated Friends of the Hoboken Public Library started the Library's free ESL program, focusing on English as a second language conversational classes. Today, the program offers three 10-week semesters (fall, winter and spring) taught by experienced tutors. Last year attracted students who spoke 24 different languages.

Today, the Library is expanding its ESL capabilities and will soon be introducing a new preconversation program to teach basic English-language skills. Once students master the basics they are welcome to participate in the ESL conversational classes.

This program is headed by the new literacy coordinator Lance Krubner. Lance holds a masters in communications with a specialty in international and intercultural communications from Rutgers University. He was an adjunct professor at St. Peter's College in Jersey City, worked in corporate training and ran the ESL program at the Englewood Public Library. He has always loved languages, is functionally fluent in Spanish and speaks a little French and Russian.

"Offering this new program reaches an underserved demographic that is not fully participating in our large mainstream economy," says Lance.

"When Spanish-speaking people, for example, don't feel comfortable or confident in speaking English, they limit themselves to only shopping in Spanish-speaking grocery stores, clothing stores, and don't interact with the community at large," Lance continues. "They're afraid of not being understood and don't want to be made fun of when they try to speak English; and their children don't have the teaching expertise to help their parents with grammar and pronunciation.

"One of my proudest moments was when one of my students told me she shopped in ShopRite for the first time."

— Sylvia Schwartz

**The next ESL session begins Wednesday, September 18th at 6:30 p.m. Join others in a lively hour of conversational English on a variety of topics. You'll receive advice on common usage and vocabulary, and explore common idioms. Visit [hobokenfol.org](http://hobokenfol.org) to learn more.**



When opportunities knock, the Library's new literacy coordinator answers.

## IMMERSE YOURSELF

Get creative at Cooper Hewitt

In Hoboken for a little over a year, Alissa Reeves has already borrowed museum passes from the Library four times! We caught up with her to find out about her favorite venues.

**What museum passes have you borrowed from the Library?**

So far, I've used the passes to the Museum of the City of New York, the New-York Historical Society, The Frick Collection and the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum.

**How did you get to the museums?**

It wasn't hard. I just took the PATH train and then either a Lyft or Uber, or the subway. We made a day of it.

**What was your favorite museum?**

I liked the two "New York" museums. One had a lot on contemporary politics, the other had vintage photos and historical exhibits. But my favorite, because I've done costume design, was the Cooper Hewitt. There was an exhibit about the 1920s with fabrics and clothing from that era. And there's an "immersion" room where you can design your own wallpaper.

**Who did you go with?**

I went with my sister, who is a graphic designer. We loved the creativity of the interactive exhibit. That was a delightful surprise – not what you think of as a typical museum. It was very engaging and I encourage anyone who loves the arts to go there.

**Where is your next museum adventure?**

The American Museum of Natural History and the Guggenheim. It's good to know that I can use a free museum pass!

— Audrey Merwin

Show your adult library card at the circulation desk to gain free access to these museums and institutions:

**American Museum of Natural History**  
**Brooklyn Botanic Garden**  
**Children's Museum of Manhattan**  
**Cooper Hewitt**  
**The Frick Collection**  
**Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum**  
**Museum of the City of New York**  
**Newark Museum**  
**New-York Historical Society**  
**Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum**

For more info, go to [hobokenlibrary.org/museum-passes](http://hobokenlibrary.org/museum-passes)



One of the interactive tables in the Immersion Room at Cooper Hewitt. Matt Flynn © Smithsonian Institution

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Friends of the Hoboken Public Library is a membership-based nonprofit that depends on member support to help us fulfill our mission of raising funds to sponsor programs and services beyond the Library's budget, such as Family FUNday, ESL classes, free Museum passes and more. If you haven't donated to Friends, please do.

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P.O. BOX 888 • HOBOKEN • NJ • 07030

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