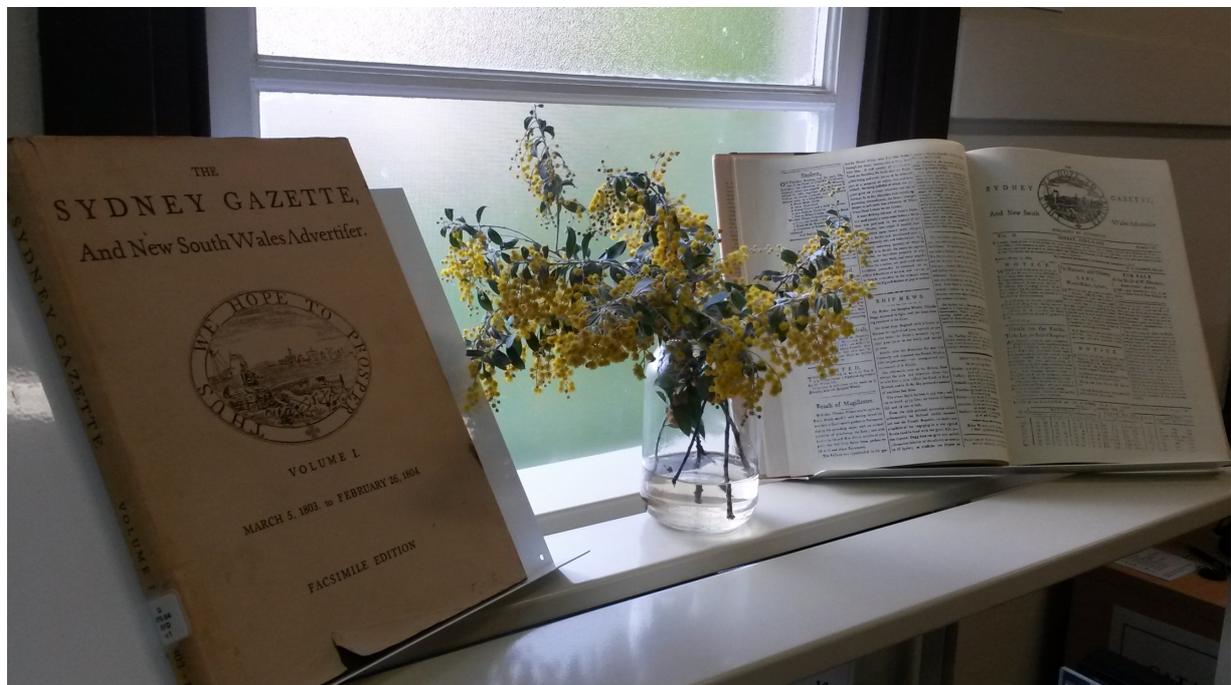




Displays in the Library

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While a library's theoretical possibilities may be boundless in many respects, some of the practical realities librarians face (budgets, space, staffing for example), create limits. My challenge over the last couple of years has been to ask myself, "What can I do with what I have now?" and, "How can I expand my students' perceptions of and engagement with the library so that they can make the most of it?"



One of the ways I have approached this challenge is by making the resources that the library has more visible and accessible to students. This has involved creating eBook shelf talkers, putting up posters of online resources in computer labs, and re-cataloguing materials to

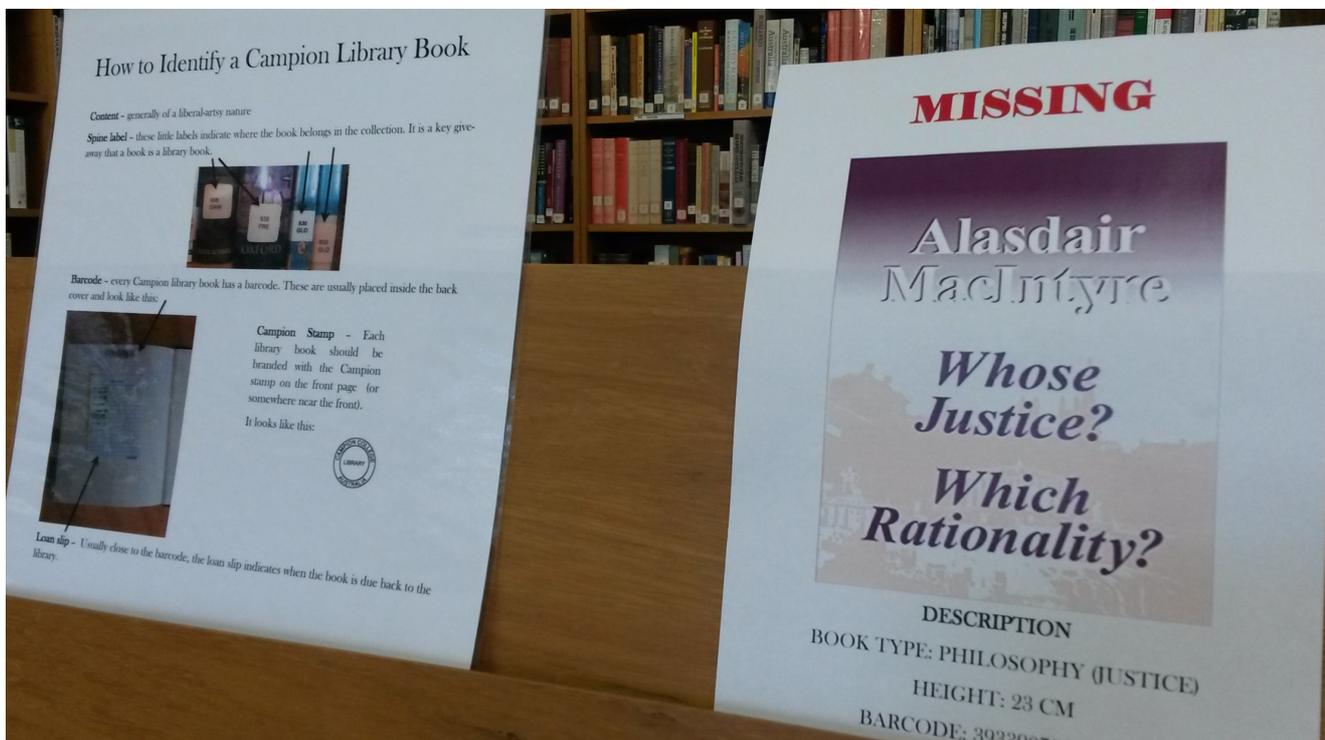
make them easier to find. Another strategy that has worked well for my library is having regular book displays. One of the strengths of the library is the quality and breadth of the physical collection of books. Having these books on display brings them out from the shelf to the floor and makes them more visible to patrons.



My original aim in creating different displays was to make something worth looking at and something aesthetically pleasing that might make the students stop and look, borrow something, and have their curiosity sparked. I have tried to incorporate variety with the displays and include images, information, quotations and posters. While the places that books can be displayed in my library is very limited (unfortunately I don't have many nice display stands), the types and topics of displays is varied.

For example, I've created displays to showcase a particular unit that is being taught, or to highlight a lecturer's research field or recent publication. Major historical events and anniversaries are a good inspiration and many of the displays in the library are centred on these events. Displays of certain genres of books such as journals, diaries, or collected letters have also worked well. Displays reflecting student events such as a major debate or a drama production highlight to students that these topics are also important parts of the library collection. Sometimes a purely 'fun' display really connects with students, for example 'Books to Read Over the Winter Holidays' or 'Books that Make You Laugh.' On one occasion, I created a

display that contained no books at all, simply 'Missing Posters' of books that were missing and instructions on how to identify a Campion Library book.



This year I have been thinking a bit more about the purpose of having displays. I wondered how many of the students noticed them, or thought the displays were valuable. I considered the various purposes for creating displays in my library context and I came up with four reasons:

1. Displays are nice to look at (creating a pleasant environment in the library is important).
2. Displays show off elements of the print collection and resources students may not have noticed before.
3. Displays can be informative.
4. Displays encourage engagement between myself and the students and the students and the resources.

Now, when I create displays, I think of how I can try to enhance these elements and make them as valuable as possible for library users. A particular example of a display that worked well was on 21st March - World Poetry Day. For this event I put a variety of poetry books out on display on the circulation desk. I printed individual poems and rolled them up on small pieces of paper tied with string for students to take from a glass jar. Throughout the day, there was a gentle hum of excitement as students picked a poem from the jar, discussed their favourite poet and exclaimed with surprise over the poetry books they hadn't realised the library held. It was a really lovely day where the students engaged with the library resources and just enjoyed the poetry books.





To see if students more generally shared my assumptions about the value of displays, I conducted a small survey one day to find out what students actually thought. I asked them a few basic questions: Do you ever notice the items on display? Are you more likely to borrow a book if it is on display? Should the library only collect items that are specifically related to the units that we teach?

The last question was asked to determine the value of displays of books that were not directly related to a particular unit or teaching topic. These sorts of displays make up nearly half of the displays in the library and while some students often borrowed from these displays, I wanted to know if students overall thought these were worthwhile.

All the regular library users and all but one of the semi-regular users reported noticing the displays. When pressed as to why they noticed them and what they liked about them, the main reasons were because the displays looked pretty, they were interesting, and they provided something different to stop and look at. A third of students said they were more likely to borrow a book if it was (or had been) on display. About two-thirds reported that if the books on display weren't directly related to their current assignment then they weren't as likely to borrow display books. When asked why, most said it was because of a lack of time for recreational reading (although some students then commented that they did borrow display books during the Christmas break.)

When it came to the third question which was, 'Do you think the library should only collect books that are relevant to the units taught?' Every response was 'no'. Some students elaborated on this by explaining why they had this opinion:

"It's really refreshing to read books unrelated to the course"

"Important to have a small breather from studies"

"Need to foster good reading habits with a wide variety of genres"

"Diverse reading is important"

"Because everything is connected"

"Our education at Campion encourages us to become fascinated with the world. These books help us explore those other interests and the world at large."

From this brief survey, I gathered that students do indeed notice the displays in the library and seem to appreciate and enjoy them. There is evidence to suggest that displays can increase borrowing and also that they do contribute positively to the library environment. I was encouraged that students appreciated the breadth of the collection and the value of diverse reading. It is my hope that they are inspired to deepen this appreciation through library displays.



Engaging with students through displays of the library's physical collection has helped me in expanding the students' perception of the library to realise what it has to offer. It has also increased their engagement with the physical resources, if not always to borrow them, to simply stop and enjoy them for a few minutes. I believe this, in itself, is worthwhile.

