

# QR Codes in the School Library: A Dozen Practical Uses

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From soda cans to movie posters, QRcodes (quick response) are everywhere. Just scan the small square image with the camera on your smartphone, tablet, or other device for access to web-based text, maps, videos, or other useful information and tools.

Let's use the power of QR technology to get students, teachers, administrators, and parents excited about using your school library. We'll explore seven steps to getting started, and then thirteen practical ideas you can try today!

## SEVEN STEPS TO GETTING STARTED

You don't need to be a technology whiz to use and create QR codes. Start by exploring what already exists, think about applications for your library, and then build your own projects.

**Step 1—Use QR codes yourself.** Download a QR app on your phone, iPod Touch, tablet, or other mobile device with a camera and web access. Go to [Mobile Barcodes](http://www.mobilebarcodes.com/qr-code-software/) (<http://www.mobilebarcodes.com/qr-code-software/>) to download software for your device.

Visit your public library, bookstore, or grocery store. Look for QR codes on books, toys, and food containers. Open your app, point your camera at the code, and information magically appears on your screen. The content might be a book blurb, discount coupon for a toy, or nutritional information about cereal. QR codes can link to websites containing text, images, videos, audio, maps, or even surveys. They can also be used to download information, send email, or complete other web-based activities.

**Step 2—Walk around your library.** Think about your students' needs. Do they know how to use the photocopier? If not, place a QR code on the copier for added instructions and directions for help. Are they aware that electronic databases might be a good choice for medical information? Place a QR code on the shelf near your health reference books.

**Step 3—Make a QR code.** Many websites provide utilities for making and downloading QR codes like QR Stuff (<http://www.qrstuff.com/>), Delivr (<http://delivr.com/qr-code-generator>), GOQR.me (<http://goqr.me/>), or Kaywa (<http://qrcode.kaywa.com/>). Try one. Revise your library brochure and place a QR code on the front that links to your library's website. Remember that mobile devices sometimes display websites differently than laptops. Check your website to ensure compatibility.



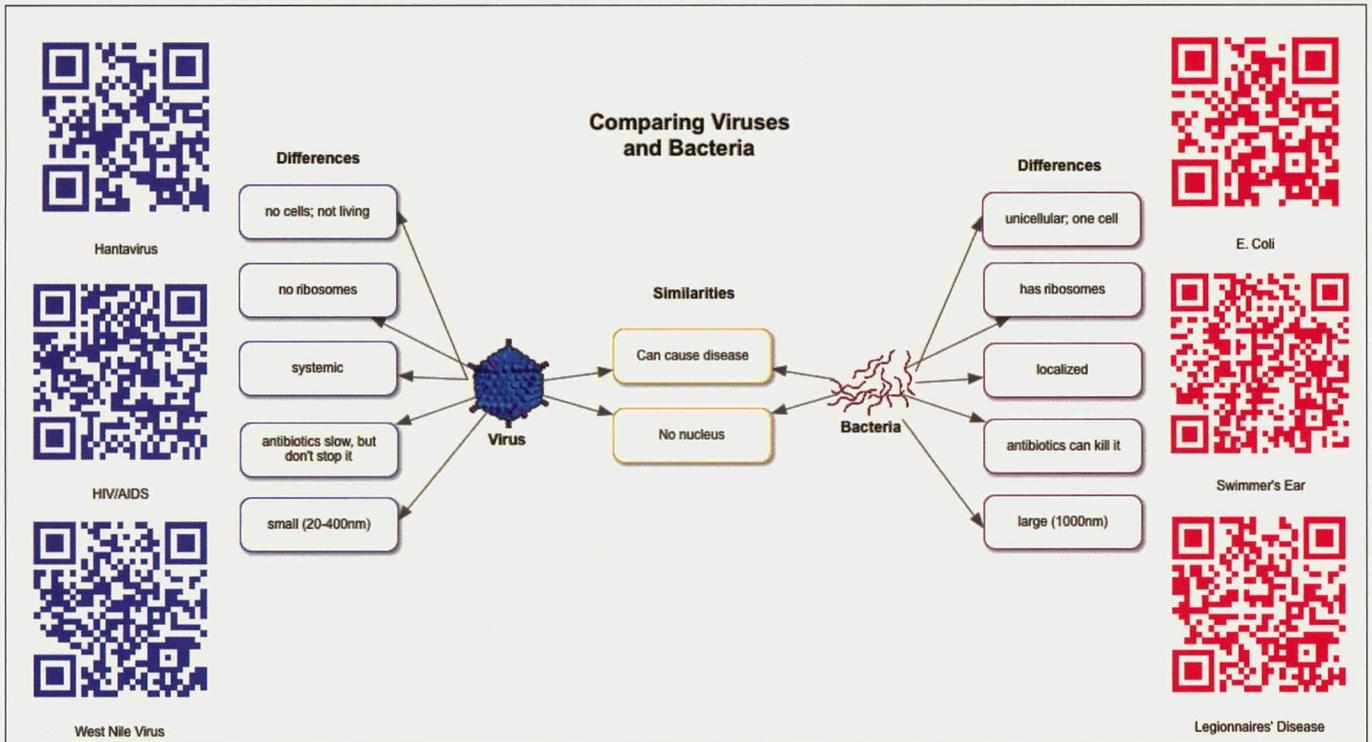
Create a QR code using QRStuff.

**Step 4—Be creative.** QR codes can be placed on bookmarks, book covers, worksheets, bulletin board, and walls. Just about any place with a flat surface. A QR code is like an invitation. Students who might not think about going to your library blog might be lured in by a QR code featured in your book display or taped to the door of the media center.

To draw their attention, use colorful QR codes or some of the fancy options that incorporate images. For instance, try Unitag (<http://www.unitaglive.com/qrcode>).

Be careful not to distort the QR code image or it won't work. Also, the glare of a book cover or shiny tape can cause problems. When placing the code, be sure it's on a flat surface. It won't work if it's folded or on a curve. Finally, try each code before you use it with others and verify that it works.

**Step 5—Provide an alternative.** It's easy to get enthusiastic about using QR codes in your library. However remember that not all your students and teachers have devices that can read QR codes. Use a URL shortener like [Google url shortener](http://goo.gl/) (<http://goo.gl/>) to create a shortened URL that can be printed out and included along with the QR code for people without QR readers. Users can simply type the URL into their laptop or other device to access the content.



QR codes in a science project.

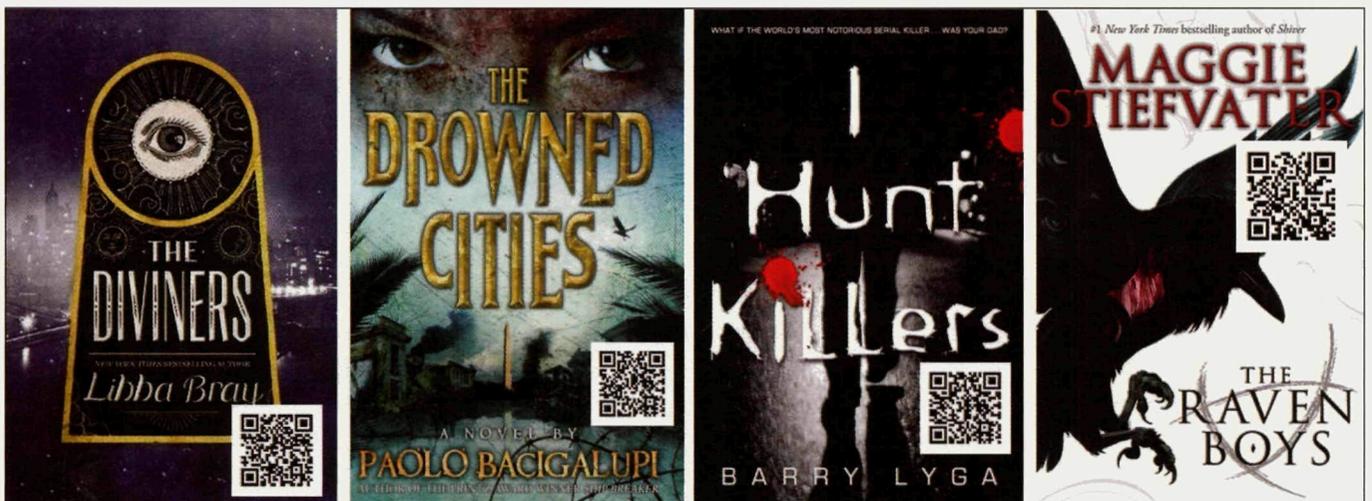
Step 6—Partner with teachers. Many school programs are using iPod touches, iPads, or other devices with cameras and Wi-Fi access. Work with your special education teachers on ways that QR codes could be used to improve access to special needs resources. Talk with your physical education and science teachers about using them in outdoor education. Think about possible ways that your Spanish students could use them to provide Spanish language audio services. For instance, scan

the QR code and hear a Spanish translation.

Create a list of all the projects students complete in your school. Think about how QR codes would be woven into the assignment. In a concept map, could QR codes link to additional information about each topic? In a diagram, could QR codes be used to define concepts or provide examples? In a timeline project, could students associate QR codes with dates on the time-

line? In an infographic project, could QR codes be used to cite sources used?

Step 7—Make it work! Use what you have. Every student doesn't need a QR reader for a project to be a success. You'll be surprised how many devices you can collect when you consider your own iPhone, a couple iPod touches, an iPad, and the smartphones students are hiding in their pockets. More than three-quarters of American teens have a cell phone and more than half of them go online with



Booktrailer QR codes on books.

their phones (PewInternet, 2012). Remember that you can download QR software for laptops too.

## A BAKER'S DOZEN QR CODE PROJECT IDEAS

Begin by using QR codes in your professional work including library marketing and professional development presentations. Then, think of ways to connect students with your library and information sources. Finally, explore ways to involve students in building their own QR code projects. Let's explore thirteen ideas.

**1 Promotional materials.** Bookmarks, fliers, and posters are just a few of the places where you can place QR codes. The codes can link to your library website, program calendar, electronic databases, or other important resources. Weave the QR codes into your marketing campaign.

QR codes might take users to Survey Monkey (<http://www.surveymonkey.com/>) for a library poll, send you an email message, or enter students in a drawing or contest.

**2 Presentation materials.** When doing professional development activities with teachers, provide a QR code on the presentation handouts to access a transcript of the presentation, PowerPoint document, or supplemental website materials. You can even place QR codes on PowerPoint slides. Users can scan them off the screen.

**3 Tours.** From freshman orientation to new student assistance, it's time to revise your school and library tours. QR codes can be placed on the map of the library. Or, QR codes can be placed in different areas of the library. When a student scans the code, they are presented with a labeled photograph of that area of the library showing details about the area and how its resources can be used.

**4 Book connections.** Use QR codes on book covers to provide access to book blurbs, author interviews, and book trailers. Think about color coding the QR codes. For instance, a blue QR code might be used for links to read-alikes displayed on a web page, blog entry, or a catalog search. Blogs work particularly well. They also get your

# Quick Spooks

Interested in some hauntingly short fiction by our favorite horror writers? Scan the QR code to download these creepy classics straight to your cell!



## THE TELLTALE HEART

By Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849)

<http://goo.gl/DG51Z>

*Synopsis from DailyLit.com: The anonymous narrator of Edgar Allan Poe's 1843 story, The Tell-Tale Heart, is suffering from a strange disease. His illness makes him hyper-sensitive to everything around him. Sights and sounds that other people might hardly notice can send this particular man spiraling into anguish and anxiety. The narrator lives with an old man who happens to have a clouded bluish eye, an abnormality that fascinates and disturbs the other man. Obsessed with his neighbor's eye, the narrator decides that its odd appearance must signify some kind of evil. He resolves to kill the elderly man and dispose of his body in a gruesome fashion, assuming that no one will suspect him of such a heinous crime. As he soon realizes in horror, however, the innocent victim of this troubled man may never let him forget what he has done.*

## WHERE ARE YOU GOING, WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?

By Joyce Carol Oates (1938-)

<http://goo.gl/YQ4K9>

*15 year old Connie is obsessed with her looks. She's fairly certain that her mother prefers her older sister June, who works as a secretary and still lives at home. Connie enjoys hanging out at the Big Boy and checking out guys, until one day when she spots an old beat up car with strange writing on it. The car belongs to Arnold Friend, who claims to be Connie's age but is evidently much older. Soon, things turn creepy as Arnold slowly reveals himself as a dark and threatening personality. How will Connie fare? This famous story by Oates was inspired by the Bob Dylan song "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue," and turned into the 1985 film Smooth Talk.*



## DRACULA'S GUEST

By Bram Stoker (1847-1912)

<http://goo.gl/D9aQS>

*Synopsis from Wikipedia.com: "Dracula's Guest" follows an unnamed Englishman traveler as he wanders around Munich before leaving for Transylvania. It is Walpurgis Night, and in spite of the coachman's warnings, the young Englishman foolishly leaves his hotel and wanders through a dense forest alone. Along the way he feels he is being watched by a tall and thin stranger.*

The Quick Spooks handout by Melissa Glidden uses QR codes to share short fiction.

students accustomed to visiting your library blog. Be sure to link to the specific blog entry rather than the entry page. Glogster (<http://edu.glogster.com/>) is an effective tool to sharing because you and your students can easily incorporate text, graphics, audio, and video.

**5 Online Reading.** From e-book downloads to online reading opportunities, QR codes can be used to link students with online content. The codes can provide access to free e-books, library e-book downloads, and online magazine subscriptions. For instance, create handouts with links to seasonal poems and short stories such as love stories for Valentine's day, spooky tales for Halloween, and patriotic poems for Veterans Day.

**6 Scavenger hunts.** Known as "scavenger" hunts by QR fans, think about how you can use QR codes in learning. Consider a science or history mystery; students could become detectives or take on other roles. They could use QR codes found around a science exhibit or placed throughout the library to collect evidence, investigate photographs, and solve a mystery or make a decision.

The QR Treasure Hunt Generator (<http://www.classtools.net/QR/>) makes creating a treasure hunt easy.

**7 Worksheets.** Whether practicing website evaluation or providing subject area content links, QR codes can be placed on any type of worksheet or handout. Use links to provide students with videos to kick-start a science worksheet or an NPR

## Your Career in Nursing



<http://goo.gl/71umE>

Do you want to be a nurse?  
Scan the QR code, then answer the following questions:

1. What does RN stand for?
2. Besides hospitals, what are three other places nurses can work?
3. What kind of education do you need to be a nurse?
4. How much does a registered nurse make in a year?
5. Is nursing a good choice if you want to get a job?

For the answers, scan the QR code or use the URL..

<http://goo.gl/RBL59>



### Q&A activity with QR codes.

current issues program to highlight a topic in the news. Use bookmarking services like **Delicious** (<http://delicious.com/>) to provide links to resources used in an assignment.

Worksheet QR codes could also provide links to online quizzes at **Quia** (<http://www.quia.com/>) or interactive tools from **ReadWriteThink** (<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/student-interactives/>).

**8 Q&A activities.** As an alternative to students using teacher-produced worksheets, involve students in creating their own questions and answers. It's a great way for students to create reading comprehension questions for peers. For instance, a student might write a series of questions on a career such as nursing from the **Bureau of Labor and Statistics** website (<http://www.bls.gov/k12/azlist.htm>). The student provides a QR code for a career webpage

for peers to read, a list of questions about the career, and a QR code that links to a document containing the answers.

Consider providing students with quality content websites such as government sites to get them started. If you're working with elementary students, consider **Scholastic** (<http://teacher.scholastic.com/researchtools/articlearchives/index.htm>) articles or resources from **Kids.gov** (<http://kids.usa.gov/>).

For a really easy activity, ask students to incorporate a Wikipedia article into their Q&A activity. Use **QRpedia** (<http://qrpedia.org/>) to create a quick Wikipedia QR code.

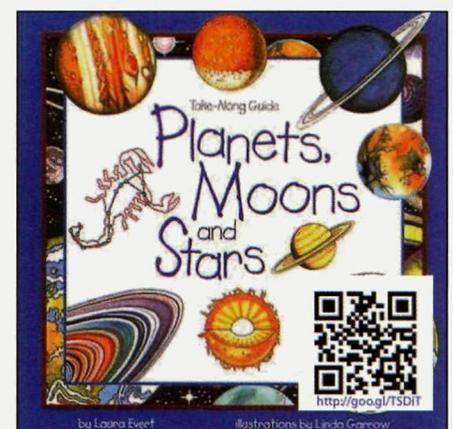
**9 Annotated bibliography.** From dioramas to posters, students often build creative projects to express their content understandings. However, it's also important that students provide an overview of their project, background information, and cite

their sources. Increasingly, librarians are encouraging teachers to require an annotated bibliography to ensure that students have used authoritative sources in the development of their creative works. Encourage students to place a QR code in their science exhibit or on their social issues poster that links to their bibliography. Students can use one of the many online word processors to write and share their assignment. For instance, in **Google Docs** (<http://docs.google.com>) students can choose to "Publish to the web..." from the file menu. This generates a URL that can be shared on a QR code.

**10 Bulletin boards.** Post photographs of the presidents and have students create QR codes to their reports. Reports can be created using free and inexpensive web tools like **Wikispaces** (<http://wikispaces.com>), **Google Sites** (<http://sites.google.com>), **Weebly** (<http://www.weebly.com/>), and **Wix** (<http://www.wix.com/>).

Post book covers of nonfiction books on a bulletin board. Then, involve students in using content curation websites like **Scoop**.it (<http://www.scoop.it/>) and **only2clicks** (<http://www.only2clicks.com/>) to organize links related to their nonfiction topic and sharing their site with a QR code. This is a great way to update nonfiction books with current information. Challenge students to create updates for your dated books on topics like Pluto, cancer research, and endangered animals.

**11 Maps.** QR codes can easily be placed on maps, such as travel or cultural infor-



The QR code provides information about Pluto and dwarf planets.



**The possibilities for using QR codes are endless, but be realistic. Like all technologies, QR codes are likely to be replaced by another equally fun fad in the future. However, right now they're hot, so take advantage of their popularity in your library.**

mation QR codes on a world map. Read books set in your state or province. Ask students to write about how the book reflects the place. QR codes can be placed on the state and linked to information about the book. Use a map of the United States to trace human migration through American history. QR codes could be placed on the Oregon Trail, the Dust Bowl migrations to California, and the Great Migration of African Americans from the rural south to the urban north. Different colored codes could represent different eras in American history. Student QR codes could link to a student-created Google Map with place-marks identifying locations involved with the migration.

**12 Walking exhibit.** Post pieces of artwork around the library. Ask students to create QR codes to go with the exhibit. The links could provide artist information and other images by the artist. You could also play an artwork game. See if students can guess the artist, then check their answer with a QR code. Consider using a tool like Voki (<http://voki.com>) for an audio exhibit.

**QR Voice** (<http://qrvoice.net/>) is an easy-to-use tool for recording your voice (up to 100 characters) and generating a QR code.

**13 Transmedia storytelling.** Involve students in writing engaging short stories that are revealed through QR codes. A story might begin with a bookmark containing the title of the story and a QR code. Scanning the code would take students to a web page introducing the story along with a clue about the location of the next QR code. Maybe the character is thirsty and heads to the water fountain. Or, the char-

acter sits in seat B32 in the auditorium. Of course, all your students will want to place QR codes in bathroom stalls!

Looking for more ways to use QR codes in the library? The Daring Librarian (<http://goo.gl/eqqBu>) has a great list of ideas on her blog.

## CONCLUSION

The possibilities for using QR codes are endless, but be realistic. Like all technologies, QR codes are likely to be replaced by another equally fun fad in the future. However, right now they're hot, so take advantage of their popularity in your library.

## RESOURCES

Brenner, Joanne. (April 27, 2012). Pew Internet: Teens. Available at <http://www.pewinternet.org/Commentary/2012/April/Pew-Internet-Teens.aspx>.

Adapted from a presentation titled *Scan Me! QR Codes in the School Library* available at <http://eduscapes.com/sessions/qrcodes>.

## YA FICTION

### UPS AND DOWNS

Chambers, Aidan. **Dying to Know You.** Amulet, 2012. 288p. \$16.95. 978-1-4197-0165-8. Grades 9-12. In a narrative device that works beautifully, a recently widowed seventy-five-year-old writer tells the story of Karl, an eighteen-year-old plumber's apprentice who comes to the writer for help in writing to his girlfriend. As Karl and the writer become friends, Karl reveals his hopes and confronts some serious problems. Spare prose and complex characters make this a gem.

Danforth, Emily M. **The Miseducation of Cameron Post.** Balzer + Bray, 2012. 480p. \$17.99. 978-0-06-202056-7. Grades 9-12. After her parents die in an accident and her aunt becomes her guardian, Cameron comes to realize she's gay, which she hides from her religiously conservative aunt. When her aunt learns that Cameron's involved with a girl, the consequences are drastic, but partially liberating for Cameron. A deeply engaging novel set in a small Montana town in the early 1990s.

Manzano, Sonia. **The Revolution of Evelyn Serrano.** Scholastic, 2012. 244p. \$16.99. 978-0-545-32505-9. Grades 6-9. When the Young Lords, a Puerto Rican advocacy group, comes to Spanish Harlem in 1969, Evelyn, fourteen, likes their ideas. Her grandmother, a political activist whom Evelyn doesn't know, arrives and supports the Young Lords, upsetting Evelyn's mother. Evelyn, her mother, and her grandmother come to appreciate each other in this wonderful coming-of-age novel.

Wright, Barbara. **Crow.** Random House, 2012. 304p. \$16.99. 978-0-375-86928-0. \$7.99 pb. 978-0-375-87367-6. Grades 5-8. This fascinating but sad slice of history takes place in Wilmington, N.C., in 1898. The town had made impressive strides in integration after the Civil War, with blacks holding many political offices. But eleven-year-old Moses, son of a journalist and grandson of a former slave, sees his world fall apart when racism threatens the political gains and Moses's own family. A vivid, heartbreaking novel.

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