

Junior Achievement

A Perfect Service Opportunity for Business Librarians

Business librarians play an important role in supporting research on companies, industries, markets, and marketing strategies. Entrepreneurship librarians, in particular, take this a step further by leveraging information in these fields to encourage the advancement of new and established businesses.

Although librarians often successfully find ways to connect with our department's faculty, students, and staff, we sometimes struggle with how to become involved with the surrounding community. When entrepreneurship librarians establish relations with local business owners and organizations, we create a dynamic network filled with opportunities for collaboration and synergy. However, should our efforts be limited to adult entrepreneurs? How do we connect with young innovators already finding ways to become active in their local economy? Within my first few months at the University of Utah's Marriott Library, I found a service opportunity at the Utah Financial Empowerment Coalition: 2023 Women in Money Conference. I visited with Junior Achievement (JA)¹ representative Kirstin Park and learned of their need for volunteers to deliver programs to elementary, middle, and high school students that focus on financial literacy, entrepreneurship, and work readiness. As someone who has taught fourth grade in the past and now serves as an entrepreneurship librarian, this volunteer role leverages my various professional obligations.

About Junior Achievement

Founded in 1919, JA is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting student success through volunteers in classrooms and after-school settings. Lessons prepare young people to thrive in a global economy by developing economic reasoning skills, future planning abilities, and an understanding of their academic and economic choices.

For third through fifth graders, the JA Our Region programming focuses on financial literacy lessons as they apply to money management, entrepreneurship, and the understanding of global markets. Fourth grade teachings include learning how economic factors and resources both contribute to and hinder entrepreneurial initiatives.

During the creation of JA Our Region, JA enlisted specialists in areas of social studies, mathematics, literacy, business, and work-readiness to compile teaching kits for volunteers. The lessons help students appreciate the ever-changing workforce and understand how entrepreneurial thinking shapes business operations. Lessons promote active learning to bring real-world situations to life.

JA Our Region is traditionally a five-day program with each session lasting forty-five minutes. Although volunteer kits are filled with well-designed activities, volunteers are

Marina Lee Narvaez is assistant librarian at the University of Utah Marriott Library, email: marina.narvaez@utah.edu.

encouraged to make each approach their own. For our program, I reimagined the programming, condensing the five-day structure into a single three-hour-and-forty-five-minute session with fourth graders. Since I've left teaching, technological advances have replaced chalkboards, and many classrooms do not have forward-facing desks. Because every visit is with a different school, I began each session by asking the teacher to help me rearrange the desks to be forward facing and to help me become familiar with their teaching devices. The following sections showcase student reactions and techniques that helped the day run smoothly.

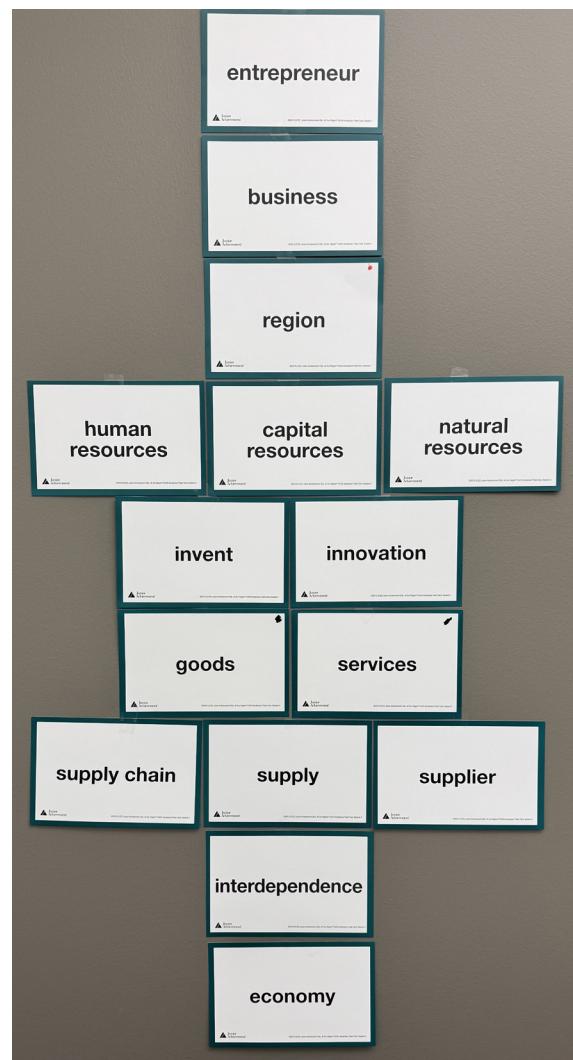
Be an Entrepreneur

After introductions were made, students explored the fourteen traits of entrepreneurs. I presented a poster showcasing these traits, and students were encouraged to connect them to their own personalities. Students shared their personal testimonies and were invited to play a quick game of charades. As a previous fourth grade teacher, I believe building excitement through fast-paced, engaging games is key for maintaining focus. Momentum from the game helped me transition to the next activity: introducing vocabulary. When presenting the vocabulary flash cards, students were encouraged to share their own interpretation of the words' meaning, and their excitement shone through as several called out their perspectives.

The flash cards were used throughout the day to establish terminology for each section. I provided details on how library resources help with research for each concept and placed them in a flowchart sequence to build a foundation for each transition. As sections were introduced, I reviewed previous definitions before new words were added.

Resources: Tools for Entrepreneurs

Posters introducing the entertainment, technology, manufacturing, sports, and food industries were presented as students brainstormed related business names and notable individuals. Then I selected a few examples students most identified with to introduce the next set of vocabulary: human, capital, and natural resources. By tying these terms to familiar businesses and individuals, students recognized how entrepreneurs utilize resources and how each resource is dependent on another to fulfill entrepreneurial operations. For instance, a sports league relies on their team's capabilities (human) to generate a crowd that buys tickets (capital), which in turn funds arenas built from materials (natural). Many students shared their unique perspective on how businesses utilize resources, which provided leeway for a lively discussion.



Dynamics of entrepreneurial ventures.

Next, a US map poster was presented, identifying resources within the eleven regions of the country, and we shared ideas on how entrepreneurs might use human, capital, and natural resources to launch new ventures within the regions. Students were then given the JA Our Region Flier, and in pairs, they designed a company by employing the resources of their assigned region. The class, as a whole, seemed less enthusiastic during this activity. Although many had wonderful ideas, they seemed unsure of their decisions. However, after addressing the uniqueness and strengths of each design, students' enthusiasm somewhat increased.

To help transition into the next section and increase the enthusiasm level, students were asked if another round of charades was due, and their excitement was visible as the next set of vocabulary was introduced. A second flowchart was established, and students were selected to act out a word as classmates made their guesses, efficiently blending learning with play.

Entrepreneurs Solve Problems

Utilizing the business designed in the previous exercise, students are asked group by group to identify a potential issue they foresee their business facing. I then encouraged them to apply a vocabulary term introduced in the previous section to work through the issue. For example, a company might boost advertising to generate the revenue needed to cover a loss.

The Problem-Solver Bookmark illustrates a problem-solving process: analyze the problem, evaluate the options, and decide on a plan. Working with their partners, students completed the steps and shared their insights with the class. As expected, many students had not completed all sections of the bookmark, so I asked them to share just one problem, option, and decision. Given that this is an extracurricular activity, I am pleased with their participation.

Hot Dog Stand Game

In this section, ensuring students understand the directions and feel confident in their mathematical skills is crucial. The game involves adding and subtracting money amounts, so I started by reviewing place value and guided them through practice problems. When introducing the game board, I referred to the vocabulary in the second flowchart to help me discuss the levels of the game.

We played two rounds together, in which the whole class played against me. While playing together, I identified students who excel in both math and game comprehension, appointing them as group leaders. The game calls for groups of four, and the leader's role is to ensure each member takes their turn, follows the directions of each move, and performs the proper arithmetic for each move. The students' enthusiasm level peaked during the game, so employing every classroom management technique was necessary—thankfully, the handy phrase "Eyes on me" still works like a charm! By circulating among groups, I aimed to boost engagement and confirmed that leaders were performing their task. A few students asked to take the lead, and of course I welcomed their enthusiasm.



Entrepreneurial operations and market flow.

Entrepreneurs Go Global

At the start of this section, we revisited the vocabulary from the first flow chart, focusing on human, capital, and natural resources. Then I introduced the new term *interdependency* using the example of foreign vehicles. Students understood that though some of these vehicles are assembled in the United States, their parts often originated globally. This sparked their interest, and students readily shared their knowledge of other products that rely on interdependency.

The related activity divides students into nine groups, each representing a country involved in assembling a computer setup. Since this segment is the shortest, it can be slotted at the day's end if time allows.

Service and Outreach

My chance meeting with Park at the Women in Money Conference opened the door to this service opportunity. There is no assessment to gauge my impact, but I rather reflect on the end-of-the-day reactions from the students. They have drawn me pictures and given me stickers and hugs, and I treasure every bit of their gratitude.

I believe any library can partner with JA as part of their community outreach, and business librarians specifically can see it as the perfect service opportunity. In my role as a business librarian, I assist professionals in their field and college and high school students. My involvement with JA extends our academic library's reach to include our community's school-aged children and reinforces the University of Utah's commitment to generating new innovations.

Conclusion

As a previous teacher, I know students cherish opportunities to break up their schedules, and JA does just that while also providing the enrichment of academic programming. With every visit, the teacher in me is reminded of their creativity, adaptability, and tenacity, and the entrepreneurship librarian in me smiles at their natural instincts of becoming innovators. 

Note

1. “Junior Achievement USA: Member of JA Worldwide,” accessed March 16, 2025, <https://jausa.ja.org/about/index>.