

ATHOL PUBLIC LIBRARY

TEEN SHORT STORY WRITING CONTEST



568 Main Street, Athol, MA, 01331 athollibrary.org/teens 978-249-9515

Generously funded by the Friends of the Athol Public Library.

Entry Rules:

- Open to ages 12-18.
- Entries must be submitted by email as a PDF or Word document to eboughton@cwmars.org, with name, town, telephone number, and title of the story in the body of the email.
- One entry per person.
- Stories must be original and written by the teen submitting them.
- Entries will be judged on creativity, originality, use of theme, and writing style.
- Stories must not exceed 1500 words
- All entries become property of the Athol Public Library and may be posted to the library's website or social media.
- Theme: Level Up At The Library
- Entries must be submitted by 11:59pm on Aug 10, 2025 .

The Stacks Between Worlds:

A story unearthed in the hidden shelves of Athol Public Library

By Alexa Anderson

Most people thought the Athol Public Library was just a sleepy brick building with overwatered ferns, clubs for kids and teens, and loud children whose voices ricocheted off the tile like rubber balls. The biggest thrill was when someone returned a VHS tape from the 90s. But no one knew about the door behind the Biography section

A door that wasn't really a door.

A door that didn't always stay closed.

That door led to The Gamebrary.

Chapter One: The Push That Opened Everything

It started on a rainy Wednesday. The sky sulked. The gutters sang.

And Raiyne Anderson, age 14, was sulking too. Her backpack was stuffed with manga, a sketchbook full of dragons, and exactly three granola bar wrappers.

She was looking for a book about weird weather for a school project. What she found instead was a dusty copy of *How to Bake With Moonlight* jammed between two oversized biographies of long-dead politicians. Curious, she gave it a tug. It didn't budge.

So she pushed it.

The bookshelf groaned like an old beast... clicked... and rotated open.

Behind it was not a closet. Not a staff room.

Behind it was a glowing hallway of floating pages and whispering wind. One page fluttered past her ear

and whispered, "Begin."

She did.

The Gamebrary Awakens: Choose Your First Power

The room stretched up forever-no ceiling, just stars blinking like thought bubbles. The shelves hovered. The books pulsed with quiet magic.

A woman appeared in a puff of typewriter smoke. Her trench coat was stitched from torn book covers, and post-it notes fluttered from her wild, windblown hair.

"Welcome, Reader," she said. "You've entered the Gamebrary. Every book is a level. Every page, a power-up. Choose wisely."

Raiyne's eyes lit up like a loading screen.

One book glowed orange. It floated toward her.

She grabbed it.

Level One: Language of Beasts

Growl & Grammar: Speak Fluent Fangs in Five Chapters.

As Raiyne read, the words curled off the pages and slithered down her throat. Her tongue itched. Her voice changed. By Chapter Two, she could growl in Wolf. By Chapter Four, she could speak Python, Whale, and small-but-angry Squirrel.

When she closed the book, the floor rearranged itself into a hallway made of twisting paper vines. A fox with golden eyes sat waiting.

"You may proceed," it said, "but beware. Poetry is not as gentle as it looks."

Level Two: The Metaphor Maze

The second room was a tornado of language-literal language.

"Time is money," so gold clocks fell like hail.

"The sky was crying," and Raiyne's hoodie was soaked in silver tears.

"She had a storm in her heart," and it was currently raining thunder in her chest.

She grabbed Metaphor Mastery: Survive the Syntax. Each page taught her how to wield similes like swords and dodge irony like arrows.

At one point, a riddle hovered in glowing text:

"She was a locked book..."

Raiyne whispered, "...until she wrote her own pages."

The wall dissolved into origami wings. A door opened.

Level Three: Choose Your Own Reality

Now Raiyne had ink-stained gloves, a sentence-stitched satchel, and a pencil that vibrated when danger was near.

A glitchy voice spoke:

CHOOSE YOUR GENRE:

- Fantasy
- Science Fiction
- Mystery
- Romance

"Mystery," Raiyne said. Instantly, the room flickered and reshaped.

Jazz music played from somewhere unseen. The shelves turned into foggy alleyways. Shadows crept. Typewriters clacked like distant footsteps. Books became case files.

She cracked open Detectives of the Dewey Decimal. The cover peeled back like a trapdoor.

She solved the Case of the Vanished Verb.

She exposed the Traitorous Typo.

She deciphered a coded message using nothing but commas and instinct.

When she turned the final page, a file dropped from the air:

PLAYER: RAIYNE ANDERSON - LEVEL THREE CLEARED.

WARNING: FINAL BOSS LOADING.

Final Level: The Censor

The lights flickered. The shelves twitched. The air grew still.

A towering figure emerged-face hidden behind a blood-red stamp: REDACTED.

Its hands were erasers. Its voice was static.

Its presence made the ink in her satchel freeze.

"You've read too much," it hissed. "Time to forget."

"No," Raiyne said, stepping back. "I read to remember."

The Censor raised a red pen the size of a battle lance.

She opened Growl & Grammar and howled.

Paper wolves emerged from between the shelves.

From Metaphor Mastery, she launched sentences like spells:

"She was a wildfire of words, impossible to smother."

From Dewey Detectives, she summoned a Punctuation Trap. The Censor tripped over an em dash and crashed into a pile of forbidden footnotes.

Still, it rose.

Raiyne reached into her satchel and pulled out one last book-blank, unwritten.

She raised her pencil and began:

"Raiyne Anderson stared down The Censor and rewrote the ending."

The monster blinked.

And vanished-exploding into a whirlwind of banned bookmarks and shredded silence.

Return to Athol

Raiyne stepped back through the spinning bookcase, returning to the familiar aisles of the Athol Public Library.

But everything felt different now.

The fantasy section shimmered softly, as if winking at her.

The graphic novels whispered stories she'd never noticed before.

The shelves seemed alive-watching, waiting, but no longer threatening.

The librarian smiled warmly.

"Welcome back, Level Five," she said quietly.

Raiyne smiled too, feeling a steady warmth inside her chest-a quiet power that didn't need flash or noise. She glanced at her satchel, where the magic books now rested peacefully, their glow soft and steady. No more battles awaited her today. No mysterious doors opening, no bosses to fight.

Just the quiet hum of pages turning, the gentle rustle of stories waiting to be discovered-and a world of adventures right here, in the heart of her library.

Raiyne took a deep breath, picked up a book from the shelf, and settled into her favorite reading nook. This was her level up: not just in games or magic, but in herself.

She smiled, ready for whatever story came next.

THE END

Ways to Level Up at the Library

by Emma Barrett

Many people think libraries are just a place to borrow books. This, however, is definitely not the case. The library is a place to level up and gain knowledge! The library has so many fun programs that I love to go to. They always teach me something new. At the library, I can do much more than read. There are programs you can attend, study or do homework. Furthermore, you can attend classes. As shown above, the library is not just a place to borrow books, but a place to level up and gain knowledge.

Did you know the library is kind of like a video game? As you get older, you can start to explore different programs. This is how you level up. Some programs are geared towards younger children, while others are for older children. There are many different kinds of programs. For the younger children, there are programs like Storytime or they can watch a puppet show. As I have gotten older, I have enjoyed crafts, like painting a piggy bank or making a cup using clay. There are also activities for all ages, like watching movies or even trading stickers. The Reptile Nook is where people come to teach you about reptiles. You can also pet the reptiles. I once held a cobra in my arms, and boy, it was thick and heavy! Libraries can be the perfect place to hang out. Additionally, the programs draw people to the library. This means it is also a time to chat with friends and make new ones as well. This is not only a great way to level up at the library, but you can also learn new things and have a fun memory to share in the future. All in all, the library is the perfect place to make friends and discover new hobbies or interests.

Is your house loud and you need a quiet space to work? Well, go to the library! There are quiet spaces in the library. I can do homework, research, or just relax. I found out that the Athol Library was built in 1903. That means it's been providing over 100 years of service. I go there all the time to look up information or do homework after school. On Tuesdays, I have dance, so I go and hang out at the library and do my school work beforehand. The library also has some comfy chairs to sit in and great places to talk with friends. Not only that, but the library is also a place where you can find a quiet space and do fun activities. For example, you can piece together puzzles, draw, or even solve crossword puzzles. You can also print things for yourself if you don't have a printer at home. All things considered, the library is also the perfect place to do homework or other activities .

Do you want to find a new hobby? Try the classes at the library. The library is the

place where I learned to crochet. Crocheting is where you use a hook and yarn to make cute stuffies or blankets. At the library, the librarians will teach you how to crochet and give you excellent project ideas. For example, a pot holder, scarf, or a blanket are good projects for beginners. There are also books related to that topic that can also give you project ideas for stuffed animals. Another activity is a Lego class where you can build with Legos. This can help people level up by learning new skills. In addition, the library also invites authors to read their books to people. I get to experience authors reading their own book! The library is not only a place to borrow books but a place to learn and grow.

Despite all that, I rarely see people my own age at the library anymore. This is why the library should have a book club. At the book club, not only can you socialize, but you can find good books by exchanging ideas. Not to mention, there, you can also read those books to gain a new perspective. If the book club has a variety of ages, then there could be

different books for different ages. That way, kids of all ages can feel included, since no one likes to get left out. This program will help everyone level up their reading and communication skills and expose them to new perspectives. All in all, the library can engage all sorts of ages with just one program, by starting a Book Club.

In conclusion, the library is not only a place to borrow books, but a place to learn, grow, and have fun. With all the programs available, classes and people to meet, I am sure you will find something that will appeal to your interests or fascinations. Now you should check out your own library for different activities and programs that will spark new interests!