

Futures Thinking & Teens

The future looms large in the lives of most teenagers. As youth on the cusp of adulthood, the structured lives they have known are coming to an end. The choices they make as new adults may shape the course of their entire lives. For teens, the ability to strategically think about the future has immense value. Learning how to assess what is and is not likely to change can help them make better decisions. Other potential benefits include:

- Reduced stress.
- Better problem-solving.
- Increased motivation.
- A more open-minded outlook.
- Improved collaboration.
- Learning how to strategically reflect on the past, as well as the future.

Despite these benefits, the ability to think about the future is a skill seldom taught purposefully. In this chapter, you will find ideas and resources to help you foster futures thinking skills in the teens of your community. Central to this work is the Futures Thinking Playbook by Katie King and Julia Rose West. This playbook uses 16 activities, spread across four larger challenges, to make the concepts of futures thinking accessible and teachable to teens. Physical copies are available for purchase online. You can also freely view it online here: <https://issuu.com/wtforesight/docs/futuresthinkingplaybook-final>

Getting Teens on Board

Before you can teach teens how to think about the future, you need to get them to show up. Teens are busy, and they won't give their time to something unless it catches their interest. Your first challenge, then, is to present futures thinking as something:

1. Interesting.
2. Important.
3. Easy to engage with.

The best way to do this will depend on your organization and how you usually engage with teen library users. School librarians may be able to partner with teachers or take advantage of lunchtime visitors to the library to get teens to show up. Staff at a public library, with its own teen advisory board, may need to get buy-in from the teens on the board before they can get a program off the ground. Take time to consider how best to promote your program. How will teens find out what you're offering? What will get them through the door?

The Futures Thinking Playbook

This chapter of the toolkit is centered around the Futures Thinking Playbook, which is a guide for anyone who wants to help a group of any age learn to think about the future in a more explicit and meaningful way. It was created by Katie King and Julia Rose West, in collaboration with the nonprofit group, Teach the Future. Teach the Future's mission is to bring futures thinking to students and schools, globally. Although the playbook is applicable for people of any age, teens are well-positioned to immediately apply its lessons to their own lives.



The Futures Thinking Playbook by Katie King and Julia Rose West, 2018.

The playbook is divided into four challenges: define, gather, imagine, and reflect. Each is composed of three to five activities called “plays.” Plays generally take 30 minutes to an hour to complete. You can pick and choose activities or work through the playbook in sequence. Many of the plays build on what teens have done in previous activities. As written, the group of students will pick out a topic to explore throughout the playbook. However, the playbook is meant to be adapted, and it’s relatively easy to approach the plays à la carte. In the next section, we’ll cover a few different ways that you can use content from the playbook.

Ideas for Using the Playbook

Here are some ideas for adapting the playbook’s different plays and concepts into library programs. These are divided into active and passive programs.

Active Programs

Futures Thinking Book Club - A good program for a dedicated/regular audience. The group will read a book, watch a movie, or play a game chosen ahead of time. During the program, you work through one of the plays or concepts from the playbook and then connect it to the chosen book/movie/game.

A Repeating Futures Thinking Series - This approach requires a more consistent audience. Each session, you work through one of the plays from the playbook with your group. Starting with the first challenge, you’ll work through the entire playbook. Although this is a more long-form approach, the teens will be able to pick a shared topic and explore it together. At the end of the series, host a party to celebrate and reflect on their work. This could be offered each quarter or as often as interest supports.

Present the Plays Individually - With a bit of editing, the individual plays work well as standalone activities. Because the playbook assumes that later challenges revolve around a shared topic, you’ll need to pick a topic with your group or make adjustments so that it can work without a shared topic. You can take a more literal approach to these programs, but it can be fun to adapt them more creatively. For example, Play 15, “Hero for the Future,” can be

adapted as a zine-making activity.

The Quiet Year – In this one, which is more loosely connected to futures thinking, you'll play a game of *The Quiet Year* by Avery Alder. It is a map-drawing game in which players imagine a small community in the wake of a civilization-ending crisis. They have a single year to rebuild. They decide on community projects and respond to unexpected events. Each game takes two to four hours to complete, so you may need to split this into multiple sessions. You need a large piece of paper, a standard deck of cards, writing utensils for each player, and lots of dice or counters to track time.

Futures Thinking Poetry Slam - Invite your teens to participate in a slam based on futures thinking (FT). You might need to do a bit of groundwork to get them on the same page. Maybe have a program through which you briefly introduce some FT concepts -- a short game like *The Next 5 Minutes* or *The Thing from the Future* are great for this. Then challenge the teens to prepare a poem to present at the next session. They should be short, one to two minutes. Remind the teens to adhere to any restrictions your library has on mature language!

Passive Programs

Rotating Futures Thinking Games - Each week, put out a simple game to help teach FT concepts. Many of these can be adapted from the playbook. Along with the game, post two to three titles of other games and let the teens vote on which game to put out next week.

Shared Futures Thinking Reflection Board - Each week, share a prompt in the teen space asking the teens to respond to a question about the future. You can use a white board, magnet poetry, or some other forum for sharing responses.

Views of the Future Quiz - Based on Play 1, "Views of the Future," this passive program plays off of the popularity of personality quizzes. By answering two questions, teens find out their own view of the future (out of four possibilities). For each one, you can then provide a follow-up prompt to get them thinking about how this perspective might be a strength.

Resources

King, K. & West, J. R. (2018). Futures Thinking Playbook. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform. ([online version](#))

Additional resources are available in Chapter 5: Additional Resources.