

Baking pans. Dolls. Legos. South Florida libraries offer more than just books



At the Boca Raton Public Library, patrons can check out baking pans, American Girl Dolls, and Literacy Backpacks with tools for reading and learning.



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You never know what you might find at your local library.

And we're not just talking about unique books.

The Boca Raton Public Library recently announced it is making baking pans available to patrons. That got us wondering, what other quirky, non-book items can be checked out at South Florida libraries?

Here's a look at what visitors can discover on the shelves. Remember that you'll need a library card to borrow these items.

Dolls, pans and backpacks:

The Boca Raton Public Library system in March announced it has 21 baking pans, which can be checked out and used to create madeleines and cakes in the shape of stars, pirate ships, butterflies and castles. The baking plans are available at the Spanish River Library, but they can be reserved and delivered to the city's downtown branch.

As an added incentive, the library is asking patrons to share photos of their baked goodies through social media or email.

"We encourage patrons who wish to enhance their baking and decorating skills, but aren't ready to spend money on a special cake pan, to borrow one from the library," said Helen Silver, Collection Services librarian.

The library system, which has two branches, also is lending out 10 American Girl Dolls. There's even a Logan, the first boy doll in the popular toy line.

Last year, the dolls were checked out 350 times, said Ann Nappa, manager of library services for the city of Boca Raton.

The library plans to add at least three more dolls this year, she said.

So, why baking pans and dolls?

"The library is about education, and people of all ages learn in different ways," Nappa said. "The cake pans and American Girl Dolls are part of a bigger picture of using different methods to spark creativity and allow people the opportunity to have new learning experiences.

"Gone are the days when people only seek education and inspiration through books."

Still, for those seeking more traditional learning tools, the library has Literacy Backpacks. Each pack, for age 8 and older, has flashcards, puppets, books and puzzles to emphasize reading and learning skills.

Info: 561-393-7852; bocalibrary.org (click on "Explore")

Day passes, vinyl records, movies:

Among the more popular items checked out at the Miami-Dade Public Library System: museum family passes.

Patrons can borrow a day pass for a family of four to visit one of the organization's museum partners, such as the Miami Children's Museum and Vizcaya Museum and Gardens. The passes are good for one visit and can be checked out for seven days.

"It's very popular," said Leila Khalil, public affairs officer for the library system. "People do ask for it. It's great if you have a family and want to go to a museum."

The library also has a collection of vinyl records (including Pete Townshend's "Scoop") and 16-millimeter films (from "Winnie the Pooh and the Blustery Day" to "Olympia II," which has highlights of the 1936 Olympic games in Berlin).

"A lot of people do movie nights, and they want to do a 'throwback' to the old film," Khalil said, noting that patrons can check out the two films at a time.

Info: 305-375-2665; mdpls.org (search for "museum pass" or "16mm films")

3-D printers, guitars, Legos:

Although you can't check out 3-D printers, you can use one for free at three branches of the Broward County Public Library System.

A Creation Station, which offers patrons a place to design and print, was launched in 2016 at the main library in Fort Lauderdale. Now there are two other Creation Stations: at the Northwest Regional Library in Coral Springs and Jan Moran Collier City Learning Library in Pompano Beach.

The latter focuses on music production and has 13 guitars. These can be checked out only if you're part of a music mentoring program at the library, such as a free children's guitar class.

Also available: LEGO kits to build models with working motors and sensors; high-definition video cameras to make movies; and green-screen backdrops (think of TV weather forecasts) that allow users to remove the background from the subject of a photo or video.

"We are always adding new items, so we encourage people to come by and see for themselves," said Catherine McElrath, publication specialist II for the Broward County Libraries Division.

Info: 954-357-7444; broward.org/library and go to "Creation Station"