



**TikTok**

**for**

**Teen Outreach**



**BERKELEY  
PUBLIC  
LIBRARY**

**Director's Brief**

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**INFO 287**

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# TikTok for Teen Outreach

“I can say without hesitation that our library program would not be as successful, supported or engaging were it not for our robust social media presence. To serve our students, we need to speak their language and we need to live where they live. And right now, a lot of our students are speaking and living TikTok. And so should we.”

-Kelsey Bogan, 2020 (@gvhslibrary)

## Objective

To highlight the value of the social media app TikTok as a community outreach tool that connects teens to Berkeley Public Library and its services

## Executive Summary

TikTok is *the* social media app that teens are currently spending most of their time on, so if we want to reach our teens, TikTok is where we need to be. More and more libraries are using TikTok to engage with teens in their communities, provide virtual library services, and promote library programs and resources. Berkeley Public Library can learn from these successes and use TikTok to connect local teens (library users and non-users alike) with real, local librarians that are focused specifically on teens and their unique interests and needs. If we want our teens to take advantage of our library programs and services, we need to meet them where they are at and start connecting with them to draw them in. TikTok can help us do just that.

**Video 1** (click on link to view)  
[@gvhslibrary reacting to recent news about censorship](#)



# Introduction

In our hyperlinked world, people of all ages are spending more and more time online, whether it's to find information on the Web or to connect with others through social media. For the teenage demographic specifically, the app TikTok has exploded in popularity in the last couple of years and shows no signs of slowing down. While most businesses, libraries included, connect with their patrons and attract new ones through social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and/or Twitter, they've been slower to tap into TikTok because TikTok is sometimes considered "incomprehensible" for the "olds" (Schwedel, 2018). This is a missed opportunity. If the teens are on TikTok and we want to reach the teens, we need to be on TikTok too.

Research shows that teens prefer getting information to meet their everyday life needs from people (over print/online sources), and they prefer getting information from friends and family, or those with whom they have an "established human relationship" (Agosto & Hughes-Hassell, 2006). Relationships with trusted adults are vital for teenagers, and librarians typically do not rank high on that list of trusted adults, indicating that they are not yet providing the highest level of service that they can to their teen patrons. Librarians need to be doing more to reach out to and connect with teens.

It doesn't help that there is currently no indication anywhere online of who Berkeley Public Library's teen librarians are, and as librarian Stephen Abram pointedly asks, "Would you go to doctors or seek out lawyers who refused to put their picture online?" (Stephens, 2016, p. 27). We need to make ourselves more visible online and put a real face to the library if we want teens to engage in our programs and services. Once we start building authentic relationships with our teens, they will be more likely to turn to us, their trusted librarians at Berkeley Public Library, in times of need. We can start building those relationships by making an effort to understand their interests and spending time with them at their favorite spot—TikTok.

## Video 2

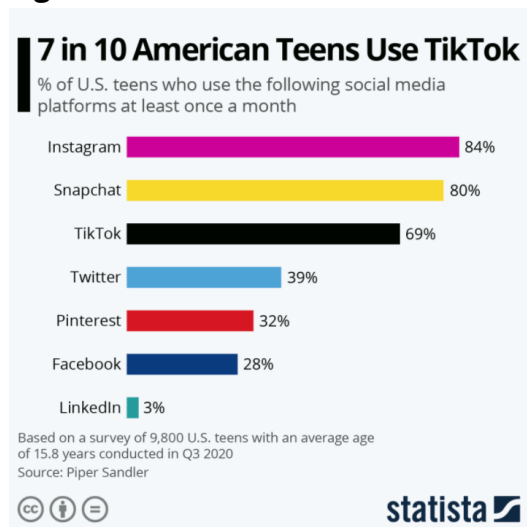
[@solanolibrary promoting a new library service](#)



# Background on TikTok

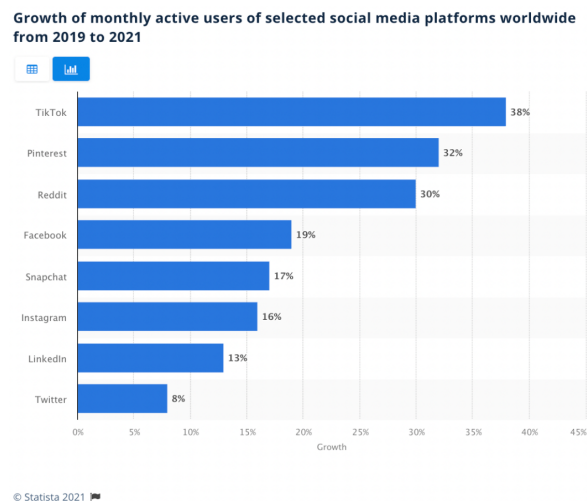
TikTok is a video-based social media platform that hit 1 billion active global users in September 2021 (Bursztynsky, 2021), up from 700 million users the summer before. TikTok started in China as two different apps, one called Musical.ly, which launched in 2014 for users to upload lip-syncing videos to, and one called TikTok, which launched in 2016 for users to upload all different types of videos to (Schwedel, 2018). ByteDance, the company that created TikTok, bought Musical.ly in 2017, merged Musical.ly's users with TikTok's users and carried on with the TikTok name and a much larger audience.

**Figure 1**

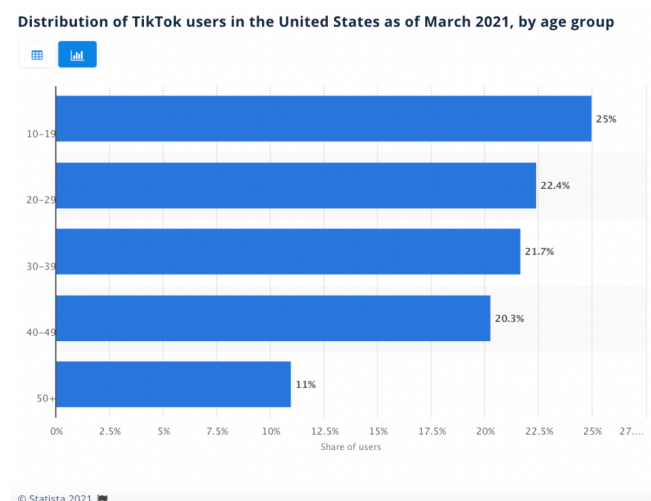


Despite its relatively short existence, TikTok has proven to be wildly popular with teenagers and young adults. 7 in 10 American teens use TikTok, far-exceeding their Facebook use (see Figure 1; Richter, 2020). Though Facebook still has the highest number of users across the globe with 3.51 billion monthly users (Bursztynsky, 2021), TikTok has seen the most growth over the last two years (see Figure 2; Statista Research Department, 2021a) and is most popular among those ages 10-19 (see Figure 3; Statista Research Department, 2021b).

**Figure 2**



**Figure 3**



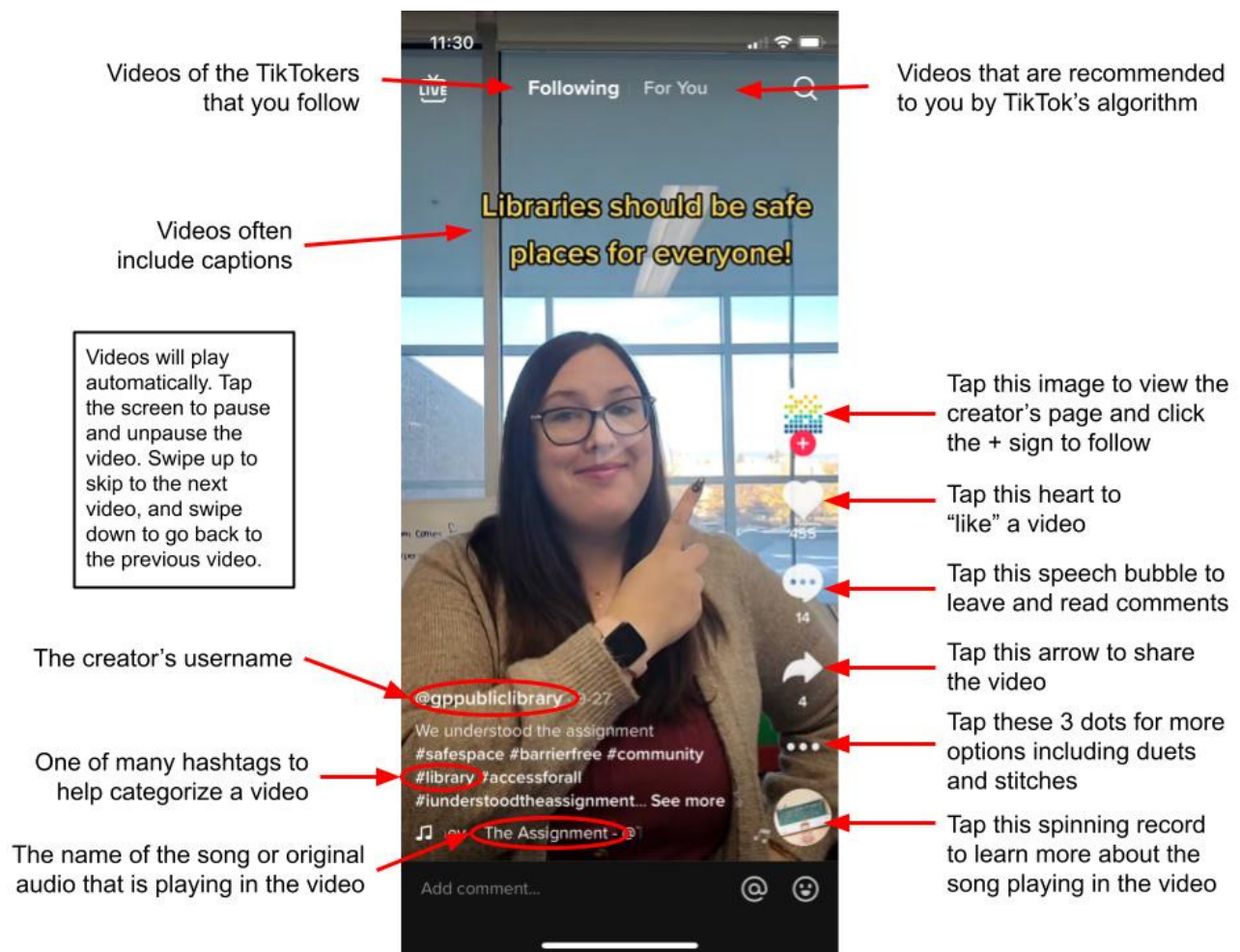
# How to Use TikTok

A TikTok account is not required to watch TikTok videos, but an account is required to create and upload videos. An account is also required if you want to like videos, follow creators, and have TikTok's algorithm make personalized recommendations for you.

TikTok videos are formatted vertically making it ideal for smartphones. When you open the app, videos "For You" start playing automatically. Here are the main components to understand when viewing and interacting with a TikTok video (see Figure 4):

**Figure 4**

*Viewing and interacting with a TikTok video*



When you open the TikTok app, you are presented with a menu of options at the bottom of your screen. In order to create a video, tap the plus sign in the white rectangle at the center of the menu (see Figure 5). This will turn on your camera and microphone so that you can record your video and play around with different editing tools and effects to make your video extra creative (see Figure 6).

**Figure 5**

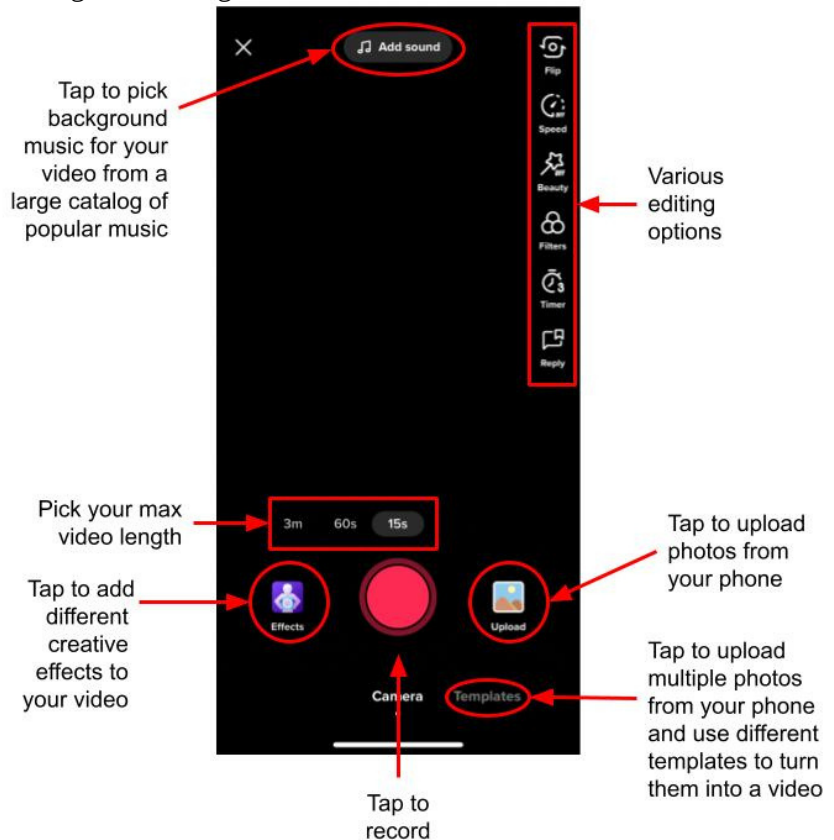
*Creating a TikTok video*



Tap here to create a video

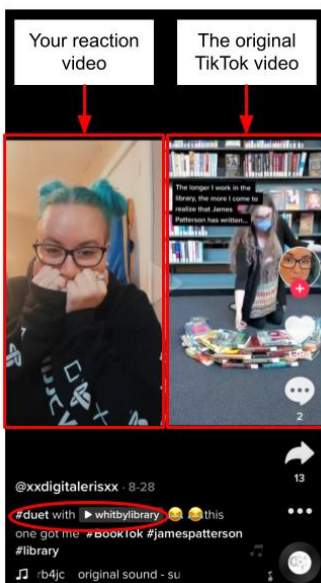
**Figure 6**

*Creating and editing a TikTok video*



**Figure 7**

*A TikTok duet*



As a direct result of TikTok's popularity and success, YouTube created Shorts and Instagram created Reels, both vertically-oriented, short-form video tools that mimic and compete with TikTok (Bursztynsky, 2021), thus showing TikTok's power and influence. TikTok, however, remains especially popular because it offers an "extensive library of special effects, AR tools, music catalog, and the dialog created among creators by way of specialized tools like stitches and duets" (see Figure 6 and Figure 7; Perez, 2021).

<b>TikTok Terminology</b>	
<b>TikToker</b>	A person who creates and shares videos on TikTok
<b>Challenges</b>	A call to do some sort of action (e.g., perform a stunt, learn a dance, etc.), record it, and use the associated hashtag when posting your video to TikTok
<b>Duets</b>	A feature that allows an original video to be shown alongside your own video which is a reaction to the original video (e.g., singing along, dancing along, making commentary, etc.)
<b>Stitches</b>	A feature that allows you to incorporate up to 5 seconds of another video into your own video as a way to react to the original video (similar to a duet, but with a shorter clip that can be “stitched” into your video at the beginning, anywhere in the middle or the end, not two videos playing side by side)

## How Libraries Are Already Using TikTok

Librarians are already on TikTok creating short videos that are informative (see Video 1), entertaining or serious, and sometimes in response to questions asked by viewers. Libraries can highlight new services or programs, like musical instruments on loan (see Video 2) or a new perler bead Makerspace station (see Video 3). Librarians can also give booktalks, create book trailers, recommend read-alikes (see Video 4), and some even offer readers’ advisory services. Patrons can leave a public comment on a video asking for a recommendation based on their interests, and the librarian can post a public video reply.

### Video 3

[@gvhslibrary\\_promoting\\_a\\_new\\_Makerspace\\_station](#)



#### Video 4

[@gallatinhslibrary](#) providing [#readersadvisory](#) services



Many library TikTok videos either show librarians speaking to their viewers (see Video 5), pointing at captions that they add to the video (see Figure 4 and Figure 5), or lip syncing to song lyrics or audio clips from movies that are related to the topic of the video (see Video 1). Librarians often also participate in dance challenges or show what a day in the life of a librarian looks like, leaning more towards the humorous in these instances. The main point is that library and librarian TikTok videos show real librarians working in real libraries, thus giving a real face and voice to a library. By watching these videos, teens can connect with their actual librarians, interact with them online and receive services, all while being entertained. Librarians can also use TikTok to keep up with the trends that teens are interested in.

Kelsey Bogan (@gvhslibrary), a librarian at a Pennsylvania high school, has over 46,000 followers on TikTok and uses the social media app as an “advocacy, branding, and community-building tool” (Jensen, 2020). Because TikTok is not about perfection, Bogan recommends playing around with the app and having fun on it while creating relatable content for teens. The more authentic you are with your videos (even if it’s poking fun at yourself as you learn how to use the app), the more authentic your engagement with your teen patrons will be. Based on Bogan’s popularity and experience, an article in the *School Library Journal* suggests that “videos with faces tend to do better than those without, and shorter videos emphasizing humor, irony, or offering a surprise generate greater engagement” (Jensen, 2020).

#### Video 5

[@gvhslibrary](#) discussing [why the Dewey Decimal System is biased](#)





<b>Some Popular Library-Related TikTok Hashtags</b>		
<b>Hashtag</b>	<b>Views (as of Nov 2021)</b>	<b>Description</b>
#BookTok	27.7 billion views	In which people share their love of books by making book recommendations, creating book trailers and booktalks, acting out scenes from books, reading excerpts from books, talking about bookstores, unboxing new book purchases, etc.
#library	743.1 million views	In which people (librarians and non-librarians) post videos that are related to libraries (including videos of amazing libraries around the world)
#librariansoftiktok	95.9 million views	In which librarians post all sorts of content about what they do as librarians (often used in conjunction with #librarytiktok)
#librarytiktok	78.2 million views	In which libraries post all sorts of content related to their library (often used in conjunction with #librariansoftiktok)
#readaloud	32.7 million views	In which people post videos of them reading books aloud

## **Considerations Before Using TikTok**

As with any social media platform, TikTok doesn't come without controversy. In response to Facebook and Instagram admitting earlier this year that it knew it was negatively impacting the mental health of teen girls (Wells et al., 2021), TikTok released a series of initiatives and resources to support the mental health of its users while still allowing creators to share their personal stories and experiences with serious issues (like eating disorders and suicide) so that people could still "find community and support each other" (Wiles & Blasi, 2021).

There was also a report that came out earlier this year about the rise of tics in teen girls who use TikTok (Cleveland Clinic, 2021). As alarming as that sounds, it was found that this was happening in teen girls with high levels of stress and anxiety who were also viewing videos created by a few popular content creators with Tourette syndrome. Fortunately, these tics are not permanent and can be managed if general stress and anxiety as well as social media use are managed. It is not a widespread phenomenon that average teen users or their caregivers need to worry about.

TikTok can be used responsibly like any other social media platform as long as safeguards are put in place. With TikTok's increased safety measures and the involvement of parents/guardians in managing social media use, teenagers can safely use TikTok and see it as a source of information and community.

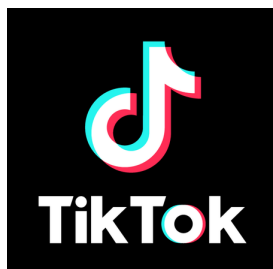
## Conclusion

Berkeley Public Library currently uses Facebook as an events calendar and Instagram to share information and interact with the community. Very little of our content is created for teens and none of it is housed in a designated teen space. TikTok is a necessary component of our overall social media and outreach strategy that is currently missing. Fortunately, it's easy to get started, and if TikTok still seems unfamiliar and overwhelming, that's okay! Only a few teen librarians need to learn how to use the app, and librarians before us have clearly laid out a path for us to follow.

What we need to do next is:

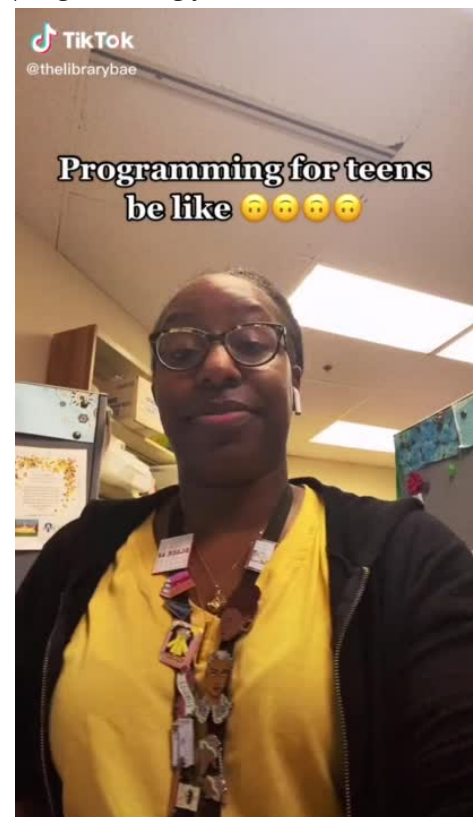
- Pick some concrete, measurable goals for teen engagement using TikTok
- Decide on the types of stories we want to tell and the messages we want to convey
- See what's popular for teens on TikTok and keep up with trends
- Play around on TikTok and learn how to use it effectively while having fun! (see Video 6)
- Get the word out that we're on TikTok
- Post videos consistently, interact with our patrons as they respond to our content, and start building authentic relationships

We are sitting in the pockets of many of our teens but we haven't yet made ourselves known. Let's take this as an opportunity to show our teens that we care, meet them where they are at, and help them see the value in their local public library.



### Video 6

*[@thelibrarybae](#) talking about programming for teens*



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