

Programming for Children in Knox County

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Children's programs are an essential part of any library. A good children's department must offer a variety of programs to fit the needs of the children in its community. For example, if a community lacks adequate after-school programs, the children's librarian might wish to include these in program planning. The key to success lies in evaluating the community's needs and providing a broad range of programs and activities to help satisfy them. It is important to keep in mind that this process of evaluating needs and planning for them is an on-going one. The most successful children's departments are those which are willing to change and update programs as needed. The intent of this article is to share with you some program ideas that might be useful to you in providing better service to your community.

Story Time Guidelines

A good "Story Hour" is perhaps the most basic and also the most important part of any program schedule. Attending a story time at the library will probably serve as most children's introduction to the library and its services. The basic goal is to win the children at a young age and keep

them coming back for more and more and more! Because story time is so essential to the eventual success of all library programs, it is worth our time to take a closer look at it.

Story selection is vital to a good story time for both the librarian and the children. When choosing a story for the children, the librarian should pick a book that he/she feels confident in telling. Always tell the story. If it is read to the children, eye contact will be lost. Once that happens, their attention is lost. It is also a good idea to have more than one story ready to tell. The mood the children are in sometimes lets us know just which story to tell that day. Always plan ahead of time, but be ready for some quick changes too. Remember that every story must have a beginning, a middle, and an end, so don't keep going on and on. Always have final goal in mind and keep things moving along quickly towards that goal.

Children come in all shapes and sizes. Some are shy and quiet and others are very noisy. No two children are even remotely alike and yet they all share some basic traits. Since the children participating in story time are usually somewhere between the

ages of two and five, and are often participating in such an activity for the first time, it is important to make them feel as secure as possible. Using the same place for every story time will help achieve this. The children will quickly come to identify with this special place in your library, a place just for them. Discipline which is administered in a loving and patient way is also necessary to create a secure atmosphere where the children can come together, have fun, and make new friends in a controlled setting.

Crafts provide an opportunity for both having fun and being creative during the story time. The basic formula here is to keep the crafts simple! Use of such skills as folding, pasting and coloring that all the children can do are usually very successful. Paper plates can be used for making clowns, owls, pictures, lions, frisbees, . . . and the list goes on! Tissue rolls are also great for crafts. They can become animals, cars or even binoculars. Kites, turtles and birds can be made from plain paper. The possibilities need only be limited by our own imaginations. Children enjoy all of this, because it is usually different from things they do at home. Any cutting must be done ahead of time, since this is a skill most preschoolers don't achieve too successfully. Have a sample ready to show them ahead of time. Children love taking home something they have made, especially something that relates to the story and will help them recall what they did that day.

Programs For School-age Children

Although story time is one program most libraries will offer in some form throughout the year, other programs are more appropriate for the summer months when school-age children have more time to pursue library activities.

Once again, the list need only be limited by our imaginations. Perhaps some of the program descriptions that follow will provide the reader with some new ideas.

A "Monopoly Tournament" for older boys and girls could be held an hour each day for one week. This can help them learn to be competitive with each other in a fun way. "Solve-a-Mystery Club" promotes learning and reasoning skills while having fun reading. The children and the librarian read mystery books together and try to solve the cases before peeking at the solutions in the back of the books. This also helps the children with reading comprehension. A child should not be forced to read aloud; only those who volunteer should be asked to do any oral reading. It is very important for everyone to feel at ease. Some good books for such a club are. *Solve a Mystery*, by Marian Lee, *Baffling Detective Cases*, by the editors of Read Magazines, *Catching Crooks* and *Clues & Suspects*, by Ann Civardi, or any of the *Encyclopedia Brown* and *Two Minute Mysteries* books by Donald J. Sobol. A "Games and Fun Time" can provide an opportunity for older children who may not be familiar with the library to become acquainted with the staff of the children's department in a very casual setting. This is the time to play the children's favorite games outdoors (if this is possible). Let the children decide on some of the games they would like to play and also teach them some new ones.

The "Cliffhanger Club" (also referred to as Book Bird Club) is a program that entices the children to read for the fun of it. This club uses the excitement of television to promote leisure reading. Each session ends in a cliffhanger situation which encourages the children to check out the books from the library in order to

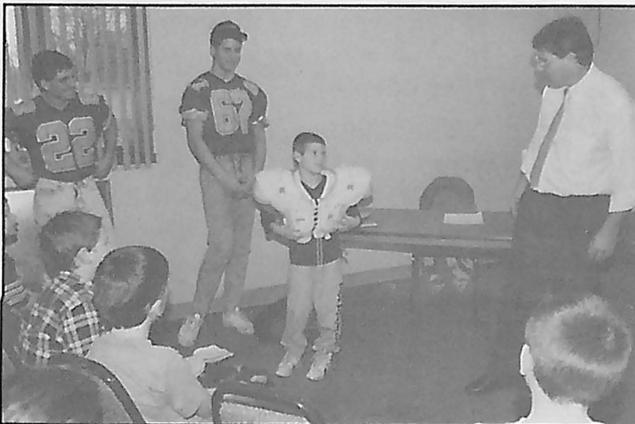
see how the stories will end. "Creative Writing" can be a challenging program to plan, yet helping children express themselves easily and clearly is worth the effort. The ability to write can be developed in any child. Even the most reluctant writer will find it fun to work with other boys and girls in a no-stress atmosphere. This can be a learning time as well as a fun time while listening to what others have written.

"Library Skills Workshop" offers a time for little ones to learn what a library really is all about. This is the time for a practical, simple, yet stimulating program aimed at giving the children the necessary skills they will need to become confident library users. Learning activities include card catalog usage, location of fiction and non-fiction books, Dewey Decimal classification, alphabetizing and use of reference type materials. This workshop is also good to use during the school year when students come to the library for class visits.

A "Reading Club" offers a way to motivate children to read a variety of books during the months away from school, thereby helping them maintain and hopefully develop their reading skills. Reading clubs can be as varied as you want to make them. "Read-to-Me Club" provides those who can't quite read on their own yet a chance

to participate in a club and get ready for the time when they will read the books by themselves. Use whatever quotas, rewards, etc. that work for your particular library. Reading clubs can also be used effectively throughout the school year. Try one at Christmas, Easter or other times you feel might work for your library. At Christmas, have a paper tree and let the children put paper ornaments on the tree with their names and the titles of the books that they have read for Christmas. At Easter, use a big paper Easter basket and let the children color paper eggs with their names and the titles of the books they read to put in the basket. Keep them reading over all the holiday vacations!

As can be seen by the varied nature of all the programs described here, a children's librarian fills many challenging yet rewarding roles in serving the community. Get to know one and you may find: an organizer, a planner, a master story-teller, a teacher, a playmate, an artist, a psychologist, a diplomat, a dreamer, a realist, a friend and a person who is dedicated to the idea that a library is a place for all children to read, work and play together. The challenge lies in filling these roles successfully. The reward is in watching the children grow up and come back to the library.



Football Coach Sienicki and players demonstrating equipment on "Super Bowl Wednesday" at the Middlebury Public Library.