

Flippin' for Books

A Library/University Collaboration

JONGSUN WEE



Photos courtesy of Jongsun Wee

Cassie marched into Winona Senior High School with her big sister and a brother. Her parents followed with Cassie's baby sister in the stroller. As soon as Cassie stepped into the building, she took off her coat and stood in line for a free book. Cassie saw many books to choose from at the greeting table. This is Cassie and her family's third year attending Flippin' for Books.

Flippin' for Books is a community event for young children coordinated by the children's librarian at Winona (MN) Public Library (WPL); this year is the twelfth anniversary of this event, held on a Saturday in November at a local high school.

Originally, it was established with a grant from the Winona Early Childhood Initiative (WECI), and they remain a sponsor; their grant money (\$200 annually) pays kitchen staff to prepare a breakfast each year. Breakfast foods are almost entirely donated by local businesses, and the giveaway books also have been donated by the library book vendors. WPL also seeks the grant from the Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation's (SMIF) BookStart program.

Flippin' for Books also has been supported by the WPL budget. Children's librarians and WPL staff start planning Flippin' for Books in August, but they reserve the school facility one year in advance.

Even though this free and well-advertised event targets children ages five and under, all children are welcome. In fact, many elementary students attend with their families.

In addition to a free pancake breakfast, attendees can attend storytime, play games at the gym, or participate in crafts. Local

vendor stations offer information on early childhood education and health. For example, a nutritionist from a local grocery store talks about healthy snack options for children, a local school explains their class activities, and a local daycare displays information about their services.

College Class Collaboration

While Cassie and her siblings enjoyed their pancakes, a university professor who coordinated craft activity stations explained the different stations available. Cassie was interested in trying different crafts; her brother wanted to visit the gym activities.

Since 2012, the children's literature class at WSU has participated in Flippin' for Books. The increasing number of attendees shows the success of the partnership. In the past, about 200 people attended. Attendance has risen every year, and last year, 770 people (450 children and 320 adults) participated.

The university students were undergraduate education majors who aspired to become teachers. WPL Children's Librarian Lezlea Dahlke and Jongsun Wee, WSU professor of children's literature, worked collaboratively. Lezlea met with the students



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several weeks before the event when Jongsun brought them to the public library.

In the library, Lezlea showed the students activity samples from previous years. She also consulted with the students about possible activities for them to do and purchased materials. Jongsun introduced the book play activities, explained the event, formed small groups, scheduled the library visit and supervised students at the event.

Cassie gave her mom all the things that she made at the craft tables, and as Cassie's mom greeted Jongsun again, she offered a heartfelt "thank you" and promised to return next year.

Everyone agrees that the collaborative work between the library and the university supports each other—the library needs volunteers to provide children with fun craft activities related to picturebooks, and the university needs a placement opportunity for future teachers to interact with young children. &