

Young Filmmakers' Sandbox

Inspiring Creativity by Nurturing Key Skills

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School-age kids are a hard group to reach, with their involvement in sports, extracurricular activities, video games, and the general busyness of life. This leaves them very little time for library activities.

Defiance Public Library has been feeling this impact; over the past five years or so, school-age participation has dramatically dwindled. Our book club for grades 3-5 had only one regular attendee. To address this issue, we needed to make a fundamental change.

While attempting to generate solutions, we developed the concept of having a knowledge club, but much of what we had in mind would require additional funding. Enter the Curiosity Creates grant, sponsored by Disney and offered by ALSC. This grant enabled us to achieve the knowledge club we were envisioning, which became known as the Agents of B.O.O.K.S. (Brainy Operatives Obtaining Knowledge Substantially).

While writing the grant proposal, we designed classes to teach our participants twenty-first-century skills while promoting creativity and self-expression. The ultimate goal for our Agents was to present the skills they learned in their own short film.

In Oct. 2015, we learned that out of four hundred applicants, we were one of seventy-seven libraries chosen to receive the Curiosity Creates grant, allowing our project ideas to become a reality. Immediately, we began promoting our new club. We designed fliers, which we delivered to our partnering schools, homeschool groups, and the YMCA. The club targeted children in grades 3 through 5. Radio ads were produced to encourage new recruits and to promote the red carpet premiere, where the final film was to be shown. Further promotion was done in

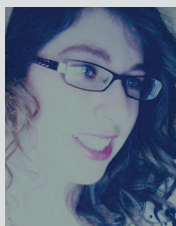


house, as well as through social media and our website. Once that was underway, we began to design the missions for our Agents.

Mission: Create

Our first mission was to let our new Agents get to know one another and the library and teach the art of the brainstorming process. We used a spy theme to motivate the kids to work together as a team. We provided them with a scavenger hunt requiring the development of code breaking and research skills. The children were given a series of clues that required deciphering secret messages in the forms of book cipher, invisible ink, mirror image text, and scytale, a form of code writing that uses a cylinder wrapped with a message on paper.

The reward for solving the clues was a well-deserved snack. The kids had so much fun with this, they would ask every month if I had hidden the snacks. However, the Agents had more tasks to undertake to accomplish their final goal. And so they continued with their missions requiring them to achieve various skills and



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activities, which they would eventually use together in combination to complete a final project or mission.

The various skills and activities of the missions included learning library research and code-breaking skills; writing an original story; learning basic hand and machine sewing; learning acting techniques; shooting a practice film; creating storyboards, props, and costumes; producing an original film short; and viewing the final film.

Making Partnerships

Over the course of the missions, participants expressed themselves in a creative manner. They also learned team work and management skills. In the Bonus Mission, the Agents were encouraged to attend an acting workshop sponsored by the Defiance Community Cultural Council (DCCC) and library partnership. This opportunity got the Agents involved not only with the library, but also in the community, giving them further exploration of the theatre arts.

Defiance College professors also provided our Agents with encouragement and direction relating to creative writing. Another partnership that was a major part of the program was through the Ohio State University Extension Office, 4-H Food and Fashion Board. 4-H sent advisors and members to assist with the teaching of hand and machine sewing. Our local organizations were happy to contribute to our events and build a relationship with the library, which we will be continuing for future events and classes.

Playing with Film

In January 2016, the Agents of B.O.O.K.S. moved into the film-making aspects of the series. When the equipment provided by the grant funding was revealed, the kids were so excited that they began improvising immediately. Our Agents were still learning skills but were given more of a sandbox approach to learning. Now it was time for them to take control. The library provided the equipment and direction they would need, but let them explore and create what they wanted as a group.

Of the \$7,500 we received from the Curiosity Creates grant, we used \$6,266 to fund the acquisition of equipment, including Go Pro cameras, studio-quality microphones, Zoom audio recorder, green screen, LED studio lighting, tripods, a drawing monitor similar to a Wacom Cintiq, Adobe Creative Cloud, and a sewing machine.

Mission Completed

The final months of the project required the Agents to work together as they crafted and finished their film. All the skills previously taught proved to be useful for creating the props, costumes, and other materials necessary. Once the finishing

touches were added and the film was completed, the Agents and their families were invited to a red carpet premiere.

The overwhelming reaction was priceless. All the Agents were excited to see their hard work on the “big screen.” After the original short film screening, the Agents received Jr. Filmmaker trophies, took photos in front of our step-and-repeat banner, a photo-op background just like those used for red carpet and other formal events, and enjoyed refreshments. Parents thanked us for providing this opportunity at the library and were excited to hear that we plan to continue the program next year.

In the upcoming year, we plan to introduce the Agents to stop-motion filmmaking. While the Agents will be using much of the same equipment purchased through the grant, they will learn new skills. As interest in the Agents of B.O.O.K.S. continues to grow, we hope to add new Agents to our club.

Throughout the series, we had fourteen Agents attend. The average attendance of nine participants per class was lower than we would have liked; however, when compared to other class series we've had, this one drew a higher participant completion rate.

We also saw an increase in library usage on nights our missions took place, with many participants returning on alternate days. We are glad that we had this opportunity to provide technology-based education to our school-age patrons, thanks to the Curiosity Creates grant. This was a great success for the library and indicates we are beginning to be able to connect with the elusive school-age patron.

Debriefing

For other libraries looking to develop a class series involving filmmaking, make sure you have plenty of help. Even though we only had eight kids sometimes, it was challenging to manage a team of kids and film equipment all at once.

Also, plan extensively. This is essential anytime filmmaking is involved. Know what you want to film and what props, set pieces, and costumes you'll need for each shot. Even with the best preplanning, be prepared for the unexpected, such as equipment failures, breakages, etc.

Mistakes provide an effective way for kids to learn, and the final film will still inspire and motivate kids to keep creating—even if it doesn't go their way or yours.

I was once told by a professor, “You have to create thousands of mistakes before you become great.” Letting kids create and make a few mistakes gives them a head start on becoming great.

To see the short film created by the Agents of B.O.O.K.S., visit our YouTube channel, Defiance Public Library, and look for “Cat and Turtle Rule the World.” 