



# Beyond Books

How Themed Parties can Save Late Summer SRP Participation

Kim Bryant

Like at most libraries, keeping kids interested in the library throughout the entire summer is a huge goal at Idaho Falls Public Library. Traditionally—and, again, perhaps like many libraries—participation in our summer reading program (SRP) is strong in June, slows in July, and drags in August.

To keep the late summer momentum going, in 2011, we started celebrating Awesome August with a themed party every week. Our Fancy Nancy party was a hit—Jane O'Connor's books are great for sharing with crowds, and the kids love a chance to dress up!

We advertised the program on all of our print and online SRP literature, with reminders posted on Facebook and our children's blog. With a maximum attendance of eighty people for our programming space, we limited our sign-ups to fifty children so we would have room for adults. We filled the program within two weeks.

The library funded the program from its programming budget, although we did consider using it as a fundraising activity. Ultimately, we budgeted \$1.50 per child for crafts, décor, and refreshments. Total cost for two sessions was \$150.

To maximize staff time, we chose two sessions, two hours apart, held on the same day and hosted by two staff members. We also started in the late afternoon so working parents could come to



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Library Technical Assistant LaDawn Fiacco, left, and Children's Library Supervisor Kim Bryant get "Fancy Nancy-fied!"

the second session. We decorated and set up once with a quick vacuum between sessions for the crumbs and glitter.

We began the event by telling Fancy Nancy stories and then released the audience to visit the different stations at their own pace. One table held a butterfly craft with adhesive jewels, markers, and sparkles. Another station held a mini tea party with cream puffs and purple punch. Using a fancy adjective chart, children wrote their own Fancy Nancy acrostic using their name:

Fancy Nancy thinks Marie is

- *Marvelous*
- *Ambitious*
- *Resplendent*
- *Imaginative*
- *Endearing*

One staff member supervised the craft table while the other watched over the refreshment and acrostic tables. Colorful, disposable tablecloths were draped down from the ceiling and combined with our purple couch and bright balloons to create a photo backdrop. When parents signed up for the program, we encouraged them to bring cameras, thus saving the library the time and money spent on taking and sending photographs to the participants.

Since our first Fancy Nancy party, we've used the same format for parties with Skippyjon Jones, Fairies, Spies, Pirates, Dinosaurs, and Princesses to great success. While some themes may appeal more to girls or boys, we welcome all kids to participate—for example, our Fancy Nancy party had a few boys in attendance.

Parents now ask about our SRP and Awesome August parties in the same breath. Our SRP participation and circulation continue to grow in August, and we couldn't be more thrilled! 🎉