# Out of School Time

## Inspiring Engagement in Children's Programming

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Programming for school age children has experienced a radical shift in the last year due to the pandemic. Out-of-school time or "after school" has taken on a different tone as some children learn at home and some are back at school.

And yet, with virtual programming libraries continue to provide a bridge between home and school. Children's librarians are digging deeper into the well of programming ideas to provide engaging library related activities. In our first column, we offer some concrete program ideas that can be utilized throughout the year when school is in session or during summer reading programming.

One of the School Age Programs and Services committee's main projects in 2020 focused on supporting literacy programming for children ages 6 to 10 through celebrating the joy of reading and encouraging children to develop critical thinking skills and to make connections to the stories they read. The committee hosted a three-part webinar series, Building Literacy in Every Library, and were joined by guest speakers.

With an eye toward inspiring curious readers, Jed Dearybury, educator and co-author with Julie P. Jones of *The Playful Classroom,* offered tips for programs for older children, reminding us to plan ahead, rehearse, extend the experience beyond the read-aloud, use diverse books, find and address universal themes, act out the story, dress up or use props, and to smile and have fun. He stressed, "Reading shouldn't have constraints."

Dearybury shared his passion for pairing children's literature with activities that encourage children to keep reading. For example, Shel Silverstein's *A Giraffe and a Half* becomes the inspiration for creating silly rhymes or a costume to help in retelling the story (an effective way to build fluency skills).

Mollie Welsh Kruger, advisor and course instructor at Bank Street College of Education in New York, helped us unlock the learning process in developing critical thinking skills. Among the numerous metacognition and comprehension strategies to employ when offering a reading program for children, Kruger's favorites include activating readers' background knowledge to make connections to the story.

Asking questions as the story progresses also helps readers delve deeper into the content. Evaluating or drawing conclusions from information in a text is essential in making inferences and predicting what may happen next. It's helpful to guide children's understanding of the story to identify the characters, setting, problem, and solution, and to discuss the specifics of the beginning, middle, and end of a story. One of the best ways to process a story is to create a visual representation of ideas that helps in processing the information by rethinking it in a different way. Doing something creative in response to a book helps to reinforce a child's curiosity.

Kruger also suggested teaching vocabulary strategies such as building meaning from context and illustrations, making connections to similar words, identifying root word clues, looking up the word in a dictionary, or asking a friend for help.

In all three webinars, we stressed the importance of intentional book selection. Shelley Diaz, reviews manager for *School Library Journal,* offered a selection of picture books, early readers, and nonfiction that are especially fun choices for read-aloud programs. They included picture books *Out the Door* by Christy Hale and *Magnificent Homespun Brown: A Celebration* by Samara Cole Doyon; non-fiction *The Honeybee* by Candace Fleming and *The Oldest Student: How Mary Walker Learned to Read* by Rita Lorraine Hubbard; and early readers *See the Cat: Three Stories about a Dog* by David La Rochelle and *Ty's Travels* by Kelly Starling Lyons.

Krista Aronson, professor of psychology at Bates College, spoke about the research that led to the founding of the Diverse BookFinder with author and illustrator Anne Sibley O'Brien. The Diverse BookFinder is a comprehensive collection of children's picture books featuring Black and indigenous people and people of color (BIPOC). It's also an online searchable database to help in locating and exploring children's picture books published since 2002 that feature BIPOC characters.

Members of the School Age Programs and Services committee recommended programming ideas and strategies for enriching literacy programs for children. Connie Hollin, K-6 library media specialist in Gillette, WY, suggests creating a language-rich environment in the effort to build vocabulary. Introducing challenging and unusual words can only produce favorable results that surprise and delight students in their discovery.

Cynthia Zervos, librarian at Way Elementary School in Bloomfield Hills, MI, has observed through engaging students virtually that children are resilient and flexible. She regularly utilizes Flipgrid (https://info.flipgrid.com) to discuss books with her students. This educational tool allows learners to record and share short videos. She also finds that students enjoy collaborating with Jamboard, an interactive whiteboard system included in Google Workspace.

Brooklyn Public Library regularly provides Team Up To Read virtual literacy programs on Zoom where program leaders interact directly with children, parents, and children's librarians. For more information, visit bklynlib.org/TeamUpToRead.

Archived videos may be found in the e-learning section of the ALSC website at http://www.ala.org/alsc/elearning/webinarchive.

*For more ideas, check out regular posts on the ALSC Blog by members of the School Age Programs and Services committee (https://www.alsc.ala.org/blog/category/bloggers/blogger-school-age-programs-and-services-committee/), typically releasing on the fourth Saturday of the month.* &