

Investing in Storytime Training

Setting the Stage for All Staff

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As storyteller Laura Holloway said, “Storytelling is our obligation to the next generation.” Storytimes give libraries opportunities to share stories and connect with families. We can build early literacy skills, provide learning opportunities, and foster a love of reading for years to come. As much as we love presenting storytimes, we must be intentional about our approach and delivery to ensure quality experiences.

Consistency is Key

Librarians each have a personalized approach to presenting storytimes, but it’s just as important that families know what to expect. With consistent structure in place, patrons know exactly what to expect in terms of developmental level and are thus able to select the storytime that best meets their needs.

Plano Public Library (PPL) starts all storytime staff with the same training, addressing the need for consistency while still allowing for individualized delivery. Regardless of the presenter or location, the approach to content remains the same, with each storytime containing specific elements. For example, Rhyme Time (ages zero to twenty-four months) features a sign of the week and bubble time. Presenters understand the importance of including these elements.

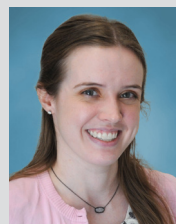
Staff enter the training process with the same baseline understanding and foundations of early literacy. Staff members who do not present are still better able to understand what takes place in our storytimes and market age-appropriate options to our

patrons. Beginning staff can help manage the room if they are uncomfortable with presenting. Transitioning staff can take on one or more elements of storytime presentations as they grow in skills and comfort. We support each staff member with opportunities to build skills and increased opportunities as they feel prepared.

A Mix of Training Methods

To develop a successful training program, be clear about your goals. You may want to offer different levels of training for different staff needs. At PPL, we have three tiers of training:

- *Overview Training:* All new staff undergo this training as part of their onboarding process. They learn about the importance of early literacy and the variety of our storytimes offered.
- *Early Literacy Baseline Training.* Done in small groups, this training delves into the core concepts of Every Child Ready to Read (ECRR). Our hands-on approach to the practices encourages interaction and offers a comfortable environment for staff to learn and ask questions.



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- **Mentorship:** Staff interested in presenting are paired with experienced colleagues who serve as mentors. Each pair focuses on one storytime. Mentees work toward the goal of presenting independently, and the process proceeds at the mentee's pace. This ensures staff are properly trained and comfortable before presenting independently, while also exploring different storytimes to find their own best fit and presentation style. Mentoring is intentionally customized to each person. This approach also introduces non-MLIS staff to ECRR and program presentation expectations, providing necessary background they may not otherwise have.

As you develop your training:

- Adjust your approach when it doesn't resonate with your trainees or their needs so content stays relevant.
- Include interactive elements. Our lecture-based instruction failed staff. Adopting hands-on training has allowed staff to take more away from the sessions.
- Have specific goals and plans. The training timeline isn't important, but working through each step is. Instead of worrying about when your next presenter will be ready, think about what they need to be confident and competent.

Training Checkpoints

Once you've established your training goals, develop a plan. It's helpful to have a specific progression of steps so that everyone understands the process. This lets you build on techniques as presenters become more familiar with key concepts.

For each phase, clearly outline the goals, objectives, and training deliverables. This guides the process and fosters engagement. Take time to evaluate both your training and trainee's progress regularly. This will help you identify when your training could benefit from updates and adjustments, and helps you assess the role or roles most suitable to each trainee. You can then modify your approach, consider different age groups, or even look at other programming opportunities outside storytime to best utilize staff talents and interests.

Adapt to Changing Circumstances

As libraries continue focusing on virtual programming, we must consider how this impacts our training. Our training model and consistent program structure allowed us to start producing virtual storytime when our buildings closed to the public in March 2020. Our ability to quickly deliver virtual content allowed our patrons to maintain some normalcy during uncertain times.

As we slowly increased staffing levels, we had enough staff trained and ready to present storytimes despite limited onsite staffing. We continually produced new content, while staying ahead of filming and editing needs for future dates. Although we filmed at five locations on different days with a variety of staff members, our focused training resulted in consistent virtual programs.

Members of our early literacy training team serve as virtual storytime consultants. Initial storytimes were filmed by these staff as the most experienced and confident to transition. We then brought in additional staff members, encouraging variety in our presentations while also giving more opportunities for staff to engage with patrons and develop new skills.

As virtual programming persists, we are reviewing our training methods and continuing to mentor staff new to a virtual environment. The mentor-mentee relationship already exists, enabling us to help presenters adapt to presenting in front of a camera instead of a room full of children. Our coaching, feedback, and guidance steers presenters in selecting materials, engaging with the audience, and creating a dynamic experience.

To keep content fresh, we regularly evaluate our storytime offerings and approach. This applies to both in-person and virtual programming. Modifications allow us to incorporate elements of our traditional storytimes while providing interesting variations, new concepts, and enhanced topics.

Here are some ways we've adapted.

- **Saturday Stories at the Farmstead.** Filmed on location at a living history museum, these storytimes utilized farm themes but introduced new surroundings and a community connection.
- **Sign Language Storytime.** These storytimes introduce basic baby signs and help caregivers understand when and how to use them.
- **Storytime Around the World.** These storytimes introduce language and cultural ideas from the different languages represented in our community. Presented with the assistance of fluent staff, they provide opportunities for families to explore new languages, but fluency is not required to enjoy the program.

Storytime has been a foundational element of libraries for generations. It benefits not only the child, but the entire family and ultimately the community at large. Well-trained and consistent presenters help us give our best to our community. Helping children develop pre-literacy skills, social engagement, and attention is a role with an investment. &