

Glowing Reviews

Blacklight Bash a Raving Success

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Cue the lights and music! As much as my co-workers joked that I was planning a rave, I was over-the-top excited to plan a Blacklight Bash for tweens at my library last summer. And while it wasn't as crazy as a rave, attendees were raving about how much fun they had!

Pre-pandemic, I visited a local museum that hosted a blacklight exhibit, which was truly immersive and mesmerizing—the posters, the artwork, the lighting, the science all combined into a sensory smorgasbord. If I thought it was cool, I knew tweens would too.

I had also read an article years ago about a blacklight party a librarian in Illinois had created for teens, so I used some of her tips as I planned my event.

Planning Was Key

While I had a list of things I wanted to include with my event—science, crafts, and sensory stations—I first had to determine logistics. My branch of the Brown County Library has a meeting room that holds about sixty people, with two large windows—that would have to be blacked out for the event.

To do so, I first tried painting the large windows black, but that proved too challenging. Then I found some large cardboard, with which I covered the windows and taped the seams, ensuring no light came into the room.

Caveat! I figured it would be fine for just a few days; however, upon removing the cardboard a few days later, I realized the window had cracked—the result of blocking the high sun rays from passing through and heating up the glass. So, be warned if you plan this event in the dog days of summer!



A skee-ball game using blacklight ping-pong balls was a huge hit, as were blacklight posters decorating the room.

Bay Custom Lighting in Green Bay offered to hang and provide the lights free in exchange for a sign noting their donation. That resulted in about a \$200 savings—which was money I was able to spend on supplies. You may also be able to rent the lights or you can also purchase UV lights fairly inexpensively online, but make sure you get enough to illuminate your designated space.

Shopping online for supplies was the fun part! I searched Amazon and other online sites for “blacklight” and “UV” products—such as posters and tapestries (for décor), paint (for rocks, paper, and T-shirts), games (puzzles and balls) and other items (glow bracelets, highlighters, etc.). With the savings from the light expense, I was able to spend just under \$200 on supplies—some of which we will likely be able to use again.

There were a few caveats to keep in mind when shopping. Searches for “blacklight” posters led to quite a few images that were inappropriate for a tween program (skulls, marijuana leaves, overtly sexual, etc.), so it took some searching to find the awesome posters I did find—with amazing glowing images (some even flocked with black velvet!) of fish, tree frogs, and sharks. (I had



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I displayed the book *The Day-Glo Brothers: The True Story of Bob and Joe Switzer's Bright Ideas and Brand-New Colors* by Chris Barton and Tony Persiani, which glowed amazingly under the lights.

attendees enter to take home one of the posters after the event—that was a big hit!)

In addition to the décor, here are a few of the other stations I had at the event:

- Blacklight painting (rocks, T-shirts, optic white paper)
- Skee-ball (our library rents carnival games, and I purchased UV ping-pong balls)
- Lite-Brite (inexpensive and nostalgia-inducing game!)
- Blacklight jigsaw puzzle
- Confession wall (writing notes with highlighter on neon sticky notes let the words glow under the lights)
- A disco ball and laser lights (as well as whale sounds on speakers) to enhance the atmosphere.

To incorporate STEM concepts, I posted signs around the room (printed in yellow highlighter so they were visible under blacklight!) with FAQs about UV light, phosphors, and fluorescence. This helped attendees learn about bee vision (bees have amazing eyesight and can see UV light), tonic water (which has quinine, which reacts under UV light), and the phosphors in highlighters—which caused white carnations to eerily glow (when soaked in highlighter-infused water).

The Afterglow

With any program, there will be wins and fails; overall, the Blacklight Bash was a success; held over two days (from 1 p.m. to

3 p.m. each day), we had just under seventy attendees total. While I advertised it as a teen program, most of the kids were upper elementary age and younger. Still, along with their adults, they all commented on how fun it was, and I heard many “oohs” and “ahhs” upon entrance. Seeing their shirts, shorts, shoelaces, and even one mom’s neon toenail polish light up was well worth the reactions!

Perhaps the best reaction came from two tween girls, who exclaimed, “This is *sick!*” A compliment, indeed, coming from them!

One fail—other than the aforementioned cracked window!—was the “glow” lemonade. When made with tonic water (which contains quinine), the lemonade should glow—but the combination of lemonade, ice, and tonic water wasn’t quite right and didn’t work. The lemonade just ended up being a refreshing treat!

So based on attendance and cost, we considered the event a success. And since we’re a system of eight libraries, we decided to purchase the blacklights (around \$150) for use in future events.

Don’t underestimate, however, how much planning such an event will take; I was the sole planner/shopper/organizer, although I did have a few teen volunteers help at the stations. But I probably put in well over five hours in prep (not including the event itself).

The Blacklight Bash was a bit out of the ordinary, but I also found a way to incorporate science and books—the 2010 Sibert Medal-winning book *The Day-Glo Brothers: The True Story of Bob and Joe Switzer's Bright Ideas and Brand-New Colors* by Chris Barton (Charlesbridge, 2009) glows great under the lights!

It was an especially bright way to usher back in-person summer programming after a long two-year hiatus! &