

Post-COVID Storytimes

What's Happening and Planning for Success

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Across the country, children's librarians have reported a marked change in their audiences since COVID. Before the pandemic, for the most part, preschoolers generally could sit still and focus during storytime. But now, children of all ages find it difficult to stay in one place for an extended period of time, and as a result, programming can be a struggle.

In this column, we have provided some resources that explain what is happening and some materials and suggestions for adapting programs to appeal to restless audiences.

Student Growth in the Post-COVID Era, <https://bit.ly/3WuOJdq>

This report from Curriculum Associates explores student data pre- and post pandemic and offers insight into recovery efforts by examining trends. Regarding reading performance, upper elementary students appear to be approaching pre-pandemic levels of performance. Children in K-1, however, are behind their pre-pandemic counterparts. Students in need of extra support or already below grade level pre-pandemic, are struggling the most.

Differences were also found across zip codes, with household incomes falling above \$75K mirroring historical data trends, and students from lower income brackets facing greater academic disparities when compared to historical data. Similar trends were found in school demographics, with Black and Hispanic students falling further behind historical levels, and white students performing as they did pre-pandemic. Older students, overall, appear to be moving closer to pre-pandemic levels of performance more quickly than younger students. Similar results were found in math performance, with most groups trending behind pre-pandemic levels. The authors offer some reasons for why the growth patterns may differ across groups, such as younger children missing out on opportunities to develop foundational skills during a critical period of time, interventions targeting more older students than younger students, greater caregiver support and resources for some groups, or different community responses to interventions. Research limitations are also discussed.

The Impacts of COVID-19 on the Social Development of Young Children, <https://bit.ly/4flyDLL>

This white paper by First Five Years Fund explains how COVID may have exacerbated Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in children who did not have access to nurturing and supportive relationships during this time. Social isolation made it difficult for children to practice group norms, negotiation skills, self-control, and decision-making, and children with underdeveloped social and emotional skills are more likely to exhibit challenging behaviors. Many children missed out on preschool and intervention services during the pandemic, which put them further behind. The article ends with several recommendations for state and federal policy changes. The most relevant to libraries is the increase in access to developmental screenings, which a number of libraries are now providing by making Ages & Stages Questionnaires and referrals accessible at their locations.

Old and New Books for Kids Who Can't Sit Still

- Anthony, Steve. *Betty Goes Bananas*. Illus. by the author. Schwartz & Wade, 2014. 32p.
- Bacon, Beth. *The Book No One Wants to Read*. Illus. by Jason Grube and Corianton Hale. HarperCollins, 2021. 176p.
- Bigwood, Kira. *Secret, Secret Agent Guy*. Illus. by Celia Krampien. Atheneum, 2021. 32p.
- Burk, Rachele. *Stomp, Wiggle, Clap, and Tap: My First Book of Dance*. Illus. by Alyssa De Asis. Rockridge, 2022. 50p.
- Clanton, Ben. *Ploof*. Illus. by Andy Chou Musser. Tundra, 2023. 56p.
- Cotter, Bill. *Don't Push the Button!* Illus. by the author. Sourcebooks Jabberwocky, 2013. 32p.
- Dunlap, Cirocco. *Crunch: The Shy Dinosaur*. Illus. by Greg Pizzoli. Random House, 2018. 40p.
- Fenske, Jonathan. *Something Stinks!* Illus. by the author. Penguin Workshop, 2021. 32p.
- Fletcher, Tom. *There's a Dragon in Your Book*. Illus. by Greg Abbott. Random House, 2018. 32p.
- Frost, Maddie. *Stir Crack Whisk Bake*. Illus. by the author. Sourcebooks Explore, 2019. 24p.
- Grandy, Charlie. *How to Talk Like a Bear*. Illus. by Alex G. Griffiths. Flamingo, 2023. 32p.
- Holub, Joan. *Every Bunny Dance Now!* Illus. by Allison Black. Scholastic, 2022. 10p.
- MacDonald, Margaret Read. *The Farmyard Jamboree*. Illus. by Sophie Fatus, sung by Bob King. Barefoot, 2022. 32p.
- Mory, Tristan. *Crack-Crack! Who Is That?* Illus. by the author. Twirl, 2022. 12p.
- Robinson, Deana. *Do Your Eyes Open Wide: A Book to Get Up and Move To*. Illus. by Chaterine Piese. Deana M. Robinson, 2024. 26p.
- Rubin, Adam. *High Five*. Illus. by Daniel Salmieri. Dial, 2019. 64p.
- Rueda, Claudia. *Bunny Overboard*. Illus. by the author. Chronicle, 2020. 80p.
- Tullet, Hervé. *Press Here*. Illus. by the author. Trans. by Christopher Franceschelli. Chronicle, 2019, 46p.
- Vignocchi, Chiara, Paolo Chiarinotti, and Silvia Borando. *Shake the Tree!* Illus. by Silvia Borando. Trans. by Walker Books. Candlewick, 2018.
- Woodward, Megan. *This Book Is Definitely Not Cursed*. Illus. by Risa Rodil. Aladdin, 2024. 40p.
- Yale, Kathleen. *Howl Like a Wolf!* Illus. by Kaley Mckean. Storey, 2021. 72p.
- Yoo, Taeun. *You Are a Lion!: And Other Fun Yoga Poses*. Illus. by the author. Nancy Paulsen Books, 2018. 40p.

Recorded Songs Involving Lots of Movement

- "Just about Anything" by Jim Gill, Hap Palmer, and Laurie Berkner!
- "Musical Scarves & Activities" by Georgina Stewart
- "Sing It! Say It! Stamp It! Sway It! V.3" by Peter and Ellen Allard
- "Hold Still" by Yo Gabba Gabba
- "Wiggle & Whirl, Clap & Nap" by Sue Schnitzer
- "The Freeze, Bean Bag Boogie and Roll Rhythm Band" by Greg and Steve
- "Mainly Mother Goose" by Sharon, Lois & Bram
- "Second Line" by Johnette Downing
- "Here We Go Loopty Loo" by Learning Station
- "Plant a Little Seed" by Nancy Stewart

Indirect Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Children Relate to the Child's Age and Experience, <https://bit.ly/3YpCW2y>

In this article from *Pediatric Research*, the authors begin by acknowledging the broad impact of COVID on child development, physical and mental health, social skills, and school readiness and point out how every child's pandemic experience could have been different. Prior to COVID, research highlighted the negative impact excessive screen time had on language development, social skills, the eyes, and even sleep. Increased interactions with digital tools during the pandemic compounded these effects. Babies born during the pandemic also faced unique experiences. Breastfeeding success and maternal bonding were challenging for some mothers due to COVID stressors. Many infants faced isolation from loved ones and may have had a hard time connecting with people whose smiles were hidden under

masks. The article ends with a call for more research on the long-term impact of COVID on our youth and more vigilant pediatric screenings.

Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on the Development of Children's Executive Functions: Implications for School-Based Interventions, <https://bit.ly/3AITbsF>

Executive Functioning is the ability to manage our attention, emotions, and behavior in pursuit of our goals. Focus, cognitive flexibility, working memory, and inhibitory (self) control are the core brain processes needed for success, and are highly vulnerable to stress. This article uses an ecological framework to describe the various factors impacting children's executive functions during the pandemic. At the macro level, we witnessed economic insecurities, daily news of virus dissemination and deaths, lack

of healthcare resources, and confinement, among other things. At the school level, there were closures, increased stress levels in teachers, remote learning, reduced student-teacher interactions, connectivity issues, etc.

At the family level, caregivers faced increased stressors, may have experienced job loss, had to homeschool, and in some instances, mistreated their own children. Children also felt the stress, had fears of becoming sick, had to deal with isolation, and also developed unhealthy habits. The article concludes with a number of strategies for lowering stress (e.g., creating routines, practicing mindfulness and relaxation techniques, promoting healthy habits) and fostering executive functions (e.g., *improving attention* by varying stimuli or shortening the duration of activities; *improving inhibitory control* by using visual reminders or allowing children to reflect on their behavior or emotions; *improving working memory* by incorporating playful learning activities requiring children to memorize steps, and *improving cognitive flexibility* by teaching perspective taking and engaging in role play; *improving planning and organization abilities* by diagramming steps).

Voices from the Library

Ontarian Librarian: The Challenges of Post-COVID Storytimes, <https://bit.ly/3WHH7W7>

Adventures in Storytime: Make a New Plan, Stan - Storytime Planning in the New Normal, <https://bit.ly/3AbuA4o>

Two bloggers share their experiences returning to in-person storytimes and the adjustments they had to make to support children who may never have experienced any group programming. In response to shorter attention spans and limited experience interacting with others in structured settings, the librarians found success when they

- sat on the floor with the children
- reassured caregivers that children would eventually become used to the routine
- implemented behavior management strategies
- used fewer books and songs
- read shorter, attention-grabbing books

- repeated activities
- incorporated movement activities
- included time to calm down
- incorporated choice
- utilized a PowerPoint to increase caregiver engagement and keep everyone on track
- replaced crafts with activities

Professional Resources for Making Storytime More Interactive

Books in Motion: Connecting Preschoolers with Books through Art, Games, Movement, Music, Playacting, and Props, <https://bit.ly/3Sv21oV>

Julie Dietzel-Glair shares a wide array of activities to use in storytime with preschoolers that are related to books that can be read aloud. The book is divided into six sections spotlighting different kinds of engagement: art, games, movement, music, playacting, and props.

Move, Play, Learn: Interactive Storytimes with Music, Movement, and More, <https://bit.ly/3Su5RyK>

Alyssa Jewell discusses the benefits of music and movement and provides programming resources, including ready-to-use storytime plans and lists of books and media.

Nonfiction in Motion: Connecting Preschoolers with Nonfiction Books through Movement, <https://bit.ly/3LIFUrd>

Julie Dietzel-Glair identifies two hundred nonfiction books across five themes (animals, concepts, construction and things that go, science and the world around us) that can be used in conjunction with art, movement, music, and props to activate learning.

Stories, Songs, and Stretches!: Creating Playful Storytimes with Yoga and Movement, <https://bit.ly/4d0iSIB>

Katie Scherrer introduces readers to yoga, provides guidance for creating yoga storytimes, and shares twelve ready-to-use yoga storytime plans. &