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Story Time Observation

The public library branch where I worked had a family story time that I observed before switching branches and becoming a children's librarian myself. This story time was part of our Summer Reading Program. The theme this year is All Together Now, and it promotes friendship and kindness. This story time was the first summer reading story time of 2023. Our senior youth services librarian, Chrissie led the story time.

The structure of the story time was an opening anchor, a variety of activities, and then a closing anchor. The program includes a mix of books, rhymes, songs, and movement activities. There were several items for sitting, then several for standing to help the kids get their energy out, and then more for sitting. After the books and the activities, they had a goodbye song and thanked everybody for coming. This was the closing anchor, and then she invited our patrons to get a coloring sheet on the way out, and they could take it out to the tables and color. This was the passive activity that concluded the structure of the story time.

The event was a family story time, and it is advertised as birth to 5 years old. It's more geared towards 2-5, but family members are encouraged to come and participate as well. The attendance on this particular day was 120 which included the kids in the intended audience bracket, as well as a few older siblings and caregivers. The average regular attendance for non-summer story time at this branch is 20-45 total attendees. No patron asked for or needed any accommodations. We did have a row of chairs in the back for those that couldn't sit on the floor. The children and most of the caregivers sat on the floor. Because of the large attendance and the size of our meeting room, when the story was read we had the other youth services associates stand at the front by Chrissie with extra copies of the book, so the patrons could all see the illustrations.

The content of the story time included songs, rhymes, movements, books, and an activity. It started with an opening song that we all sang called "Hi, Hello and How Are You". This created an atmosphere to help the kids focus, so we were ready to begin. Chrissie gave a welcome and introduced our Summer Reading Program. She politely asked caregivers to silence their devices and reassured patrons that it is fine to come and go as the kids need, and it isn't disruptive. Then she encouraged caregivers to join in, as kids mirror their adults more than the library staff. Since all the patrons were sitting, we started with Humpty Dumpty. The next rhyme was Roly Poly that had arm movements that went with it. The first book was "Bear Has a Belly" by Jane Whittingham. This book has an interactive element of letting the kids repeat the phrase, "and I do too." Chrissie read the book and the kids practiced pointing to body parts. After the story, she gave an early literacy tip to the caregivers. She said, "Did you notice

that our book had lots of worlds that might be unfamiliar to little ones – words like wiggly, sturdy, and slippery. Sharing picture books is a wonderful way to introduce new vocabulary words.”

After this, the patrons were asked to stand for the next segments. We all played a version of Simon Says that she changed to the Librarian says. This gave the kids opportunity to move and participate physically. Next was another rhyme that was “Eeny Teeny Mine Mo.” In the middle of the program, Chrissie switched it up and introduced an activity. The youth services staff passed out paper plates and the kids got to use them as symbols while we listened to music. Then the kids gave one of the plates to their grownup and they put the plates on their heads and tried to draw a smiley face. At this point many of the kids were getting restless and so Chrissie started singing “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star” to regain the focus. Next, she read the beginning of “From Head to Toe” by Eric Carle. However, since both the kids and caregivers were starting to talk, Chrissie stopped in the middle and expertly told the patrons that they could check it out and read the end. She concluded the family story time by singing a goodbye song, and then they passed out coloring sheets while patrons left the room to go to the table and coloring supplies.

The teaching style had a variety of elements and included interactive and demonstrative parts. Participation was encouraged for both the kids and the caregivers. Kids learn more from their grownups, and so they are more engaged if their caregiver is excited to participate. There were teaching moments where the kids just sat and listened, but it was mixed in with free movement time. Because of the size of the group, there were two library associates that assisted in handing items out as well as holding up extra copies of the books.

Since I observed at the branch where I was working, I was able to sit and talk with Chrissie later that afternoon. She shared with me her planning process and how for each story time there is a goal, a strategy, and a desired result for the children. The component for this time was vocabulary. Her book choice and early literacy tip both supported this goal. The main goal was for children to recognize words and show understanding through listening. The strategy was to share books that feature a variety of words that may be unfamiliar to children. The desired goal for the children's behavior was that children will understand and use increasingly complex vocabulary. Chrissie showed me her outline, and we looked over what she actually incorporated and what elements she cut. She emphasized the ability to adapt and be able to cut or improve based on what is going on in the room. The patrons have no idea what gets cut, so it is ok to change elements to make a more successful story time.