A Year in the Story Room
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A Year in the Story Room
Ready-to-Use Programs for Children

Dawn Rochelle Roginski

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Dawn Rochelle Roginski is currently the early childhood outreach librarian at Medina County (Ohio) District Library. She visits more than 25 preschools, daycares, and Head Start classrooms every month where she shares her love of children's books and enriches the early literacy skills of more than 600 children. Formerly, she was the children's librarian at the Chagrin Falls and Garfield Heights Branches of Cuyahoga County (Ohio) Public Library. During her ten-year career with CCPL, she conducted hundreds of storytimes for children of all ages. Roginski holds a master's degree in library and information science and a bachelor's degree in elementary education, both from Kent State University. She lives in North Royalton, Ohio, with her three children and two dogs. She enjoys regular visits to her local library and sharing the stories she finds with children.
To Mom, Dad, and Randy:
 Thank you for your unwavering support and constant encouragement, without which I may never have pursued my passion.

To Rachel, Leah, and Alex:
 Thank you for the quiet hours that you spent in my lap listening, enjoying, and critiquing an infinite number of picture books.

To my mentors and colleagues at CCPL:
 Thank you for the many lessons taught, learned, and carried away from the best library system in the nation.

To my newest colleagues and library family at MCDL:
 Thank you for focusing on children, their early literacy, and the purest mission of any public library: to take stories to the children who crave them the most. I am so fortunate to spend my days living in my dream job. Thank you for making my dream a reality.
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PUBLIC LIBRARIES ARE FILLED WITH CHALLENGES. LIBRARIANS ENTER A workplace struggling with decreased funding, despite increasing demand for newer technology. They are expected to know the perfect book, the right website, and how a library computer opens picture files from any given digital camera. They are expected to be fluent with the latest musical groups, know how a particular movie is rated, and predict the future of DVDs. Library staff, often at minimum levels, patiently delivers these customer services with a smile.

An already busy children’s librarian adds the additional responsibilities of staying current with local school assignments and accelerated reader lists, and is expected to have “that” book a teacher plans to use tomorrow. The libraries' youngest customers also demand engaging displays as well as exciting and educational programs. Preparing programs can devour the time of the most competent children’s staff. Children’s librarians often enter Youth Services because of the opportunity to be in storytime. Busy schedules make it extremely difficult to take the time to look through the multitude of planning books already sitting on the shelf. If only there were enough hours to plan those quality programs!

Relax, and look no further. In a single volume, A Year in the Story Room:

- Considers the time restraints of the entire library staff
- Provides an entire year of programming that serves a wide range of youth customers
introduction

- Allows a library youth staff to attract and retain program attendees
- Uses best practices and combines with multimedia to deliver content
- As written, will accompany the librarian into the story room day in and day out

The programs in this book have been successfully used in a library branch. They represent the best of ten years in a story room. They have been gathered together from multiple sources and the author's experiences with what "works" with groups of children. The programs are in alignment with best practices, are age appropriate, and are enjoyable for the target audience. Best of all, these programs are right here, all ready to join you in the story room. Simply gather the books and sound recordings from your shelves, print out the patterns, and be ready for those little ears, alert faces, and captivated imaginations. Have no worry that increasing your attendance will be problematic. When the children return and bring their friends, you'll be well prepared; simply turn to the next page of *A Year in the Story Room*.

Each chapter begins with a few words about the theory behind the program's design. While the programs were designed with the goal of entertaining a specific audience, they were also structured with educational theory in mind. Librarians have always conducted programs filled with books, rhymes, flannelboards, and songs. Researchers have confirmed that all those things are instrumental in preparing children to read. What is done in storytime meets the criteria for developing early literacy skills. Our storytime elements do not need to change. But we do need to keep in mind the reasons we are including each book, rhyme, and song. Our knowledge gives us power. We can use that power to foster a love of reading and indirectly create readers. Preparing children for school and assuring they are ready to read are an admirable focus for all children's librarians and public libraries.

While these plans are "ready-to-go," some advance preparation is necessary. A time line to aid preparation is offered to minimize the time spent on planning. Materials and supplies, in list format, will need to be gathered or purchased in advance. The Plan Ahead section of each chapter is intended as a guide.

Follow the thumbnail links in each section to print out the patterns for the flannelboards and magnet boards. Allow enough time to finish the cutting and laminating. Sample letters to parents, rhyme sheets, and book club worksheets are ready to be printed from the appendixes and through the links provided. Shopping lists have been developed. Sources for materials have been offered but are by no means exclusive. Feel free to deviate so as to best meet an individual library's needs and budget.
Many tips and tricks for working with a particular age group are contained in each chapter. Based on experience, these suggestions are offered to help each and every storytime run smoothly. Working with children cannot be done successfully without some flexibility. Keeping this need in mind and using the ideas and approach in this book will save planning time, maximize children’s enjoyment of storytime, and develop early literacy skills.

Good luck and enjoy!

NOTE

FEW BABIES ARE WELCOME INTO THEATERS, FINE DINING ESTABLISHMENTS, or even places of worship. They cry, fuss, attract attention, and create commotion. Infants are unpredictable and unable to understand the decorum required of a library. Still, libraries advertise and recruit the youngest of babies into the library purposefully.

Librarians have good reason to draw the youngest of the community into storytime. Research demonstrates that literacy can begin even before birth. Decades ago researchers Bradley and Bryant were proving that the experiences a child has before going to school influence his school-age ability to learn.1 According to “Becoming a Nation of Readers: Report of the Commission on Reading,” “The single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children.”2 The Commission confirmed that the number of literate experiences a young child is exposed to directly affects the nature and extent of adult capacities.

The physical capability to read must be hardwired into the brain. While many of the processes are automatic, full development cannot be achieved without excellent caregiving. The baby’s brain contains 100 billion neurons and ten times that many “glue” (glial) cells that protect and nourish them. Each of the billions of neurons sends out long, spindly signal senders (axons) to make
connections to the shorter, bushier signal receivers (dendrites) of other neurons. Axons and dendrites create this “wiring.” Sending the electrical impulse across the gap (the synapse) to make the connections between the cells creates the brain’s communication structure. The brain first makes the networks that are required for survival. But the child’s sensory experiences control not only the number of neurons but also their size and strength. A caring, stimulating environment sends more electrical impulses, creating more neurons and literally growing a bigger brain.

A child’s capacity to learn therefore is directly related to the number of pathways that are formed and strengthened. Talking and reading to babies help their brain neurons connect. When a connection is used repeatedly in the early years, it becomes permanent. The more experiences parents provide to their babies, the more opportunities babies have to permanently establish learning pathways in their brains. Repetition is not just something babies enjoy; it is something they need in order to learn successfully.

Library programs for babies are specifically designed to be filled with repetition. They are to be filled with activities that encourage infants to play and interact with books. Reading out loud to babies teaches that books are important and that reading is a positive experience.

While the primary intent for baby storytime may be to connect the infants’ developing synapses in a fun way, the storytime is also an opportunity to model strategies that parents can use to develop early literacy skills and help create that larger brain outside of the library. Story programs can help parents provide a foundation for reading success. We can share information about early literacy with parents. But, while talking to caregivers, we must keep the focus on the baby. We must keep them engaged in fine and gross motor development and language rich activities. Together with the parents, librarians help young children on the road to a lifelong love of reading and books.

**Preparation**

In this chapter, a one-year plan is divided into four seasons. Each quarter offers a repetitive lineup of songs and rhymes. The variety from week to week will come from the books that are read out loud. Following each plan is a suggested book list. Both age-appropriate and seasonally appropriate titles are listed. It is possible to choose the titles to be “themed,” but it is not necessary.

The books and activities are presented in the order they should be used with the children. Keeping the order of the activities the same is not only to assist the librarian but also to benefit the children. The children need to alternate between a still listening time and an active movement time. Additionally, each rhyme should
be repeated several times, as we previously discussed. Rhymes and songs can be repeated more quickly, softly, loudly, or slowly to keep attention high and offer some variation for the adults. Repetition also gives the babies the opportunity to babble and sing along with a beloved verse. The entire group should clap and cheer after the completion of each and every rhyme and each book. Babies love praise, and often the “cheering time” is their first opportunity to participate in the program by clapping.

As the group assembles, ask the adults to sit in a circle on the floor of the story room with their children on their laps. A few folding chairs should be available for elderly caregivers or expectant mothers. When it is time to begin, join the circle yourself. For the rhymes, sitting on the floor along with the audience is an advantage to model the movements of each rhyme. Some presenters may feel more comfortable using a doll for modeling. Slide up to a stool or chair for the book reading so all can see the illustrations. As your babies arrive, pass out the rhyme sheets (found in appendix A, available for copying) to the adults. Before performing a rhyme, offer a brief explanation of the movements for each song or rhyme. (Another advantage to keeping the program the same for a quarter of the year is that the motions of each song and rhyme become familiar to the caregivers and less explanation is needed. By the end of the quarter, the program moves very smoothly, and even the babies know when their favorite part is coming.)

Before entering into your program it is necessary to set a few ground rules for the participants. Remind them at the start of each session that babies are not capable of perfect library behavior. Assure caregivers that you are okay with some fussing, squirming, burping, farting, spitting up, and a bit of wandering. However, be definitive on setting limits. Explain that while some crying is acceptable, when other babies join in with a fussy friend it is time to take the unhappy children outside the story room to give them a minute to regain composure. Assure caregivers that if they step out of the room, they are always welcome to rejoin the group, whether in a few minutes or at the next session. If one wanderer starts a parade of wandering babies, ask caregivers to return all children to their laps. After establishing these guidelines, tell caregivers that they will be participating with their child. Explain that the program is interactive and requires parental participation.

When the climate of story hour is set, introduce yourself and invite each caregiver to introduce herself and to share her child’s name and age. Welcome each child by name, and when all attendees have been introduced start into your opening. Every storytime begins with the librarian’s own unique opening. There are many ways to start a storytime. An example of an opening sequence is offered in appendix B. Whether you choose a song, puppet, or rhyme, make your opening unique. Over time children will identify the opening component
of storytime with a favorite librarian. Move quickly into your hello song. Music captures attention, and the babies have already been patient throughout your housekeeping discussion and introductions.

As you move through the activities, linger and repeat favorites. Find opportunities to interject the suggested literacy statements into transition times (or use your own). Informally educate the caregivers, being careful not to lose the babies’ attention while you share information. Don’t alienate those adults already present by lecturing them on what they may already know, that reading is important. The children are already in the library—that is an awesome first step in raising a reader! Praise the caregivers for coming and making literacy a priority for their child.

Insert the longer of your chosen books when attention is highest. Don’t be alarmed if while you read the babies start exploring the room. But keep to your previously stated limits. The babies are still being exposed to words and literature. After finishing the story, quickly move into your next rhyme. The activities that follow the books are time-tested favorites as they rein the children in, ideally back to their caregiver’s lap. Music is useful in redirecting attention to the rhymes and accompanying movements. If necessary, specifically request that parents bring babies back to their laps for a bouncing, singing, or clapping rhyme.

After listening to two stories and participating in approximately eight rhyming activities, most infants have reached their saturation point. It is time to excite them with a new visual activity. Blow bubbles slowly during the bubble song. Walk around the circle, being sure to blow bubbles near each child. Stationary babies will track the bubbles with their eyes if you blow them several inches above their line of vision. Blow some bubbles up high, some at eye level, and some toward the ground. Walking babies will enjoy stepping on the bubbles that remain on the floor. Bubbles may still be floating through the air as you move into the goodbye song. The babies may be more interested in the bubbles then the motions of your final song. That is okay. They are still hearing an activity that fuels their developing brain.

When the goodbye song ends, place a basket of board books and a toy set in the center of the circle. Invite the caregivers to individually share a book or two with their babies and to socialize a bit with the other families as the babies play. The librarian may be able to spend extra time in the story room, or may need to return to other duties, depending upon library rules and staffing levels at the time. Play a sound recording for the families. It provides a background that continues the focus on building a larger brain. The playtime is enjoyable for not only the babies but the caregivers as well. For some, this is their treasured time to converse with other adults. They enjoy the opportunity to compare maternity stories and to discuss their parenting successes and concerns. It is also a natu-
eral time for the adults to create relationships with similar families. Play groups often emerge from baby storytime. Hopefully these playgroups will continue to meet at and attend library programs throughout their children’s early years. It is also a great time for marketing library resources and upcoming programs. Have fliers and exciting new materials displayed around the room. With little effort these materials often find their way home to families.

**Plan Ahead**

The purchase of a small start-up set of toys, bubbles, and board books for storytime use is necessary. Ideally library funds will be available. If not, perhaps monies can be set aside from another budget line. With administrative approval, approaching the Friends of the Library for a storytime donation is possible. For items that are used repeatedly, the small investment pays big dividends.

Six to eight weeks before your program begins, start purchasing and collecting toys. Not all toys need to be new. Keeping library policy in mind, ask for donations from staff and customers. It is often economical to shop at garage sales or resale shops. Sanitize all toys before use with library approved sanitizer. (Keep toys sanitized between uses as well.)

Toys that are economical, exciting, and educational should be considered. Keep the toys separated into groups. Rotate which group comes (one for each week of your quarter) to storytime on any given week. This keeps the toys interesting to the babies. The six groups can ideally consist of:

Building toys—for example, Soft and Safe Building Blocks from Lakeshore Learning (www.lakeshorelearning.com)

Sorting toys—for example, Color/Shape Discovery Boxes from Lakeshore Learning (www.lakeshorelearning.com)

Puzzle toys—for example, Chunky Puzzles from Discount School Supply (www.discountschoolsupply.com)

Fine motor toys—for example, large beads, vehicles, nesting cups, and shape sorters from DaycareAtoZ (http://daycareatoz.com)

Puppets and/or instruments—if possible, borrow these from your library’s floor toys or from the toddler and preschool storytime supplies that will be suggested in chapter 2.

Large motor toys—for example, a crawl-through tunnel, a slide, a push mower, or several ride-on toys from Little Tikes (www.littletikes.com)
One month before your program begins, print and copy the rhyme sheets for the quarter. Order your music and consider burning the tracks onto your own storytime CD or playlist. Having the musical tracks in order on one disc or playlist will help the program run smoothly and minimize the transition time for the babies. Have the full-length CDs on display and available for checkout.

Two weeks before your program begins, finalize your opening routine. Check out the necessary books and audio recordings and confirm that your music playing device is operational.

One to two days before you present your program, reread the books and familiarize yourself with the music and movements to accompany the songs and rhymes. Review key literacy statements you hope to emphasize. Place all your resources in the story room and leave word with a colleague where the materials are—just in case!

**Tips and Tricks**

- Because attention is highest at first, start off with the longest book. The shortest selection should be your last. Please share books that you enjoy reading or enjoy hearing read out loud. If you are enjoying a book, it is likely the children will take notice of your enthusiasm. If you enjoy a story, the children are likely too as well.
- Smile and laugh if something goes awry. The children and parents have not seen your storytime plan. They will not notice any changes or mishaps. They see only your facial expression. Make it one of genuine enjoyment. Enjoy the children and audience. Parents are often nervous with first babies. They crave the reassurance we give them about their parenting and love the time we spend occupying their children.
- Encourage hand washing before and after the program. Supply a library-approved hand sanitizer for after playtime if it meets with library policy.
- It is helpful to have boxes of tissues available for runny noses and spit-up. Most parents come supplied with these, but extras never hurt. Caution parents on some of the more rigorous bounces. Caution them to take it slow especially if a child has just enjoyed a feeding!
- Get to know the babies’ names. Babies love to hear their names, and often using their name will steer their attention back on the presenter and the program. Or it may send a shy but exploring child back to their caregiver’s lap! Some librarians place name tag labels on the babies’ backs. Because the labels are on the back, babies are not able to play the labels.
with or eat the name tag. If using stickers, remind parents at the end of the program to remove the tags before leaving the story room. Not only is this for baby safety, but washed and then dried stickers can become a laundry disaster.

- Observe your caregivers and know your audience. Learn as much as possible about your families. Some groups may welcome instructional guidance and information about early literacy. Other, more educated attendees may find it insulting. Never preach to your audience. They are in the library, and that demonstrates their value of reading already. Concentrate on a program that is fun and keeps them coming back.

- Try to schedule your program at times when babies are naturally awake. Ten or eleven in the morning is often a good time. For working parents, you may want to offer an evening session as well. It is fun to invite the babies to attend the program in pajamas. Some libraries even give their evening baby time a special program name to reflect the babies’ attire.

- If you have children, talk about them. Interject that a book was your daughter’s favorite, or share your son’s favorite lap ride. Knowing you are a parent in addition to being the librarian earns parental trust. They know that you have been there and understand the ups and downs of the difficult job of parenting. They are more likely to approach you, ask for resources, and discuss their children with you as parent as opposed to librarian.
Suggested Literacy Statements

- Finger plays help infants connect words and movements.
- The number of books a child is exposed to is a predictive factor for the ease in which a child learns to read.
- Rhymes do not need to make sense to babies. They enjoy the sound of words even if the adult thinks the nonsensical words sound silly.

Opening

Song

- Caregivers should clap babies’ hands, roll their arms around, kick their feet, and stretch their arms and legs to accompany the lyrics.

Rhyme

The itsy-bitsy spider
Climbed up the waterspout. (walk spider fingers up baby’s arm)
Down came the rain
And washed the spider out. (tickle baby’s arm)
Out came the sun
And dried up all the rain. (make circle over head and sway to rhythm)
So the itsy-bitsy spider
Climbed up the spout again. (walk fingers up arm)

Rhyme

(Bounce baby on knees.)
Bouncing, bouncing on my knee.
Bouncing, bouncing on my knee.
Bouncing, bouncing on my knee.
Just Baby and me.
I’ll swing you high and swing you low, (lift baby and down)
I’ll hold you close, and I won’t let go. (hug baby)
Book 1

- All the animals are in place on the farm—except for Goose. Children cluck, muck, mew, and coo in search of Goose.

**Rhyme**

*(Clap baby's hands in rhythm.)*
Pat-a-cake, pat-a-cake, baker's man,
Bake me a cake as fast as you can.
Roll it and pat it and mark it with a B, *(roll baby's hands and tickle belly)*
And put it in the oven for baby and me! *(clap baby's hands)*

**Rhyme**

*(Tap the rhythm on baby's feet, alternating right and left foot.)*
Cobbler, cobbler, mend my shoe.
Get it done by half past two.
Half past two is much too late.
Get it done by half past eight.

Book 2

- Hen counts to 10 with her friends and their chicks.

**Rhyme**

Round and round the garden, like a teddy bear,
*(gently trace finger in a circle around child's palm)*
One step, two step, *(walk fingers up child's arm)*
Tickle you under there. *(tickle under chin, under arm, and on tummy)*

**Rhyme**

- Caregivers touch babies’ hands to babies’ toes, twist babies’ bottoms in their lap, bounce babies on leg, clap babies’ hands, help babies wave bye-bye, and help babies throw a kiss. Motions accompany lyrics.
**Bubble Time**


- The librarian blows bubbles around the story room, letting the babies visually track and pop bubbles. The librarian circulates so all babies—walkers and nonwalkers—may experience the bubbles.

**Goodbye Song**


*(Put one hand under the opposite elbow and wave, alternating right and left arms.)*

Skinnamarink a-dink a-dink,
Skinnamarink a-do, I love you.
Skinnamarink a-dink a-dink,
Skinnamarink a-do, I love you.

*(sign I love you: point to yourself, cross fists over heart, point to baby, and repeat with reverse hand)*

I love you in the morning, and in the afternoon,
*(for morning, make low circle using arms; for afternoon, move arms in front of body)*

I love you in the evening, underneath the moon.
*(for evening, move arms over head)*

Skinnamarink a-dink a-dink,
Skinnamarink a-do, I love you.

**ADDITIONAL FALL BABY-TIME TITLES**


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