Harry Potter Escape Room (on a $0 Budget)

Columbus Public Library

Children

|

Tweens (10-12)

|

Teens

|

Young Adult

|

Adults

|

Intergenerational

Harry Potter Escape Room (on a $0 Budget)

Mar 6, 2020

Free

Byline
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The Harry Potter Escape Room gave patrons 30 minutes to work together to find clues and solve puzzles. Cracking the code granted them escape from a locked room decorated like a section of the Great Hall.

We had no money to create the escape room, so our challenge was creating clues and using decor that we could find, for free, on our own. The trick proved to be starting with an inventory of what we had on hand.

Advanced Planning

When we first ran this escape room program in fall 2018, we began working six months in advance and made all the plans from scratch. We looked at our budget ($0), what we could make or bring from home, how we could theme around that décor, and then made a scenario and clues to fit.

At first, we tried to work the other way around, making a scenario, then clues, etc., but the lack of available materials was too problematic, and we switched the order to accommodate. The program model from Laramie County Library System was our jumping-off point.

In March 2019 we offered the program again, making only made minor tweaks to the original plans.

Marketing

As with all of the library's programming, this program series was promoted in our seasonal program guide. Closer to the event date it was also posted to Facebook. After posting to social media, calls came pouring in and the program was full within a few hours, as was the wait list.

Budgeting

We were very fortunate that my colleague, who partnered on the program with me, had many ideal decorative materials from home that were perfect for the Great Hall atmosphere. She provided lanterns, candles and tableware. As we're both huge Potter fans, we brought our own merchandise to add an authentic touch.

We had no budget, so the rest of the items we needed to make ourselves. We took weeded books and printed "spell book" covers for them; made posters of portraits and used foil and cardboard for the frames; and a volunteer painted cardboard to look like stone, which we used to cover the door and windows. For more details, see our Escape Room Overview.

Day-of-event Activity

A full hour is needed to set up this program. We used two rooms and had patrons compete to escape fastest. For us, this increased the fun factor, but it meant twice the set-up.

Ideally two or three people make set-up easy, but if your supplies are well-organized, one person can do it in one hour. Again, if you're organized, one staff member and a volunteer can also work well.

One unexpected challenge that popped up was patrons walking in to participate who had not signed up for a time slot. When we ran the first sessions in 2018, we sadly had to turn folks away. To remedy this in 2019, we prepared a scavenger hunt that would occupy these patrons as they waited to see if another group failed to show. The hunt was Harry Potter-themed and took them around the library, locating materials and using resources. The hunt was originally sourced from here and adapted to suit our library.

Program Execution

Over all three dates, this program got approximately 80 attendees. The rooms hold a maximum of six participants per session.

The feedback from patrons was overwhelmingly positive. Some groups were made of strangers who ended up working together and having a great time. Many were happy to have the chance to do an escape room without spending a fortune, to do something in the family fandom, or to have the team-building opportunity for the small business, church or scout troop. Our goal of creating an intergenerational program that promoted problem-solving and community teamwork was achieved.

As a result of this program, our library became the talk of the town! Staff attending various community events met patrons who attended and gushed about the great time they had, and visits to our Facebook page increased. Patrons provided great feedback on the logistics of the escape room and offered up similar program ideas they wanted to see implemented.

Ultimately, this program showed our community that our library is a resource where they can learn and have fun as a family or organization.

Advice

Plan ahead several months in advance. Our library system schedules programs approximately four months in advance, but if you already know this is something you'd like to do, I'd say plan TWO program seasons in advance if you can. This will significantly ease the stress of dedicating staff time to creating the puzzles and clues, as well as give you time to troubleshoot working around a limited budget, if necessary.

Another bit of advice: if you have the funds, invest in a Breakout Box. This will greatly help you in developing puzzles, and it can be used repeatedly.

Did you try this program at your library? Share your experience using this form.

Supporting Materials

Document

hp_escape_room_overview.doc
Document
hp_scavenger_hunt.doc
Download this Program as a PDF

- Programming Librarian Facebook Group

Slideshow Images





More Programs

Sep 15, 2016
Children (9 and under)+ | $$$
Image



Harry Potter: Event Extravaganzas

Audiences:

Audience
Children (9 and under)
Young Adult (17 - 20)
Nov 3, 2017
Teens (13-16)+ | $
Image



Harry Potter Escape Room

Audiences:

Teens (13-16)
Young Adult (17 - 20)
Adults (21 and up)
Jan 17, 2020
Children (9 and under)+ | $$
Image



Harry Potter Escape Room (No. 2)

Audiences:

Children (9 and under)
Tweens (10-12)
Teens (13-16)
Young Adult (17 - 20)
Adults (21 and up)