Virtual Story Times at Denton Public Library

Emily Fowler Central Library

Children

|

Tweens (10-12)

Virtual Story Times at Denton Public Library

Apr 3, 2020

Free

Byline
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We began having weekly virtual story times using the Facebook Live platform on March 20, shortly after closing for the COVID-19 virus. We wanted to give people a chance to be together synchronously, even if it was virtual.

We included books, interactive songs, fingerplays, dances, puppets and craft ideas. We also used a guitar and a ukulele and encouraged interaction by having

participants pick which instruments we would use for certain songs.

We started with two people doing the story time on camera, but as social distancing became more important, we had only one person present the story time. Another person remained behind a puppet stage operating the puppets.

Advanced Planning

Once we were given the green light to pursue this idea, I began putting together an agenda for the program that included lots of interactive songs that included a good deal of gross motor movement (see Attachments at the right). I knew parents were looking for activities for their children to do while stuck at home, and I wanted this to be educational as well as physical.

I didn’t want to violate any copyright laws with reading books, so I sought out guidance from a number of places. I finally landed on a great School Library Journal article that served as a clearinghouse for publishers' relaxed rules during the COVID-19 situation.

I chose to use a book published by Macmillan since it seemed to offer both live streams on public platforms and the option of archiving the stream in a publicly accessible space.

Our first book was "Be Kind" by Pat Zietlow Miller. I chose this book because I knew my own children were having a hard time adapting to being at home and in close quarters, and that while we were all staying home to keep from sharing germs, kindness was something we should share.

Marketing

The city of Denton's Public Affairs Department used social media (Twitter, Instagram and Facebook) to promote the program. A Facebook event was created so people could sign up to attend and receive reminders. Library staff shared the Facebook event on their personal pages and to Facebook groups that might be interested.

After our first story time, a Dallas reporter from the local public radio station (KERA, 90.1 FM) contacted us about doing a radio and print story. Our first story time was Friday, the radio and print story ran that next Wednesday morning, and our second story time was that same Wednesday at 11 a.m. Responding quickly to the media request helped create synergy and excitement and also gave library staff another link to share that promoted the story time on social media.

Budgeting

Other than staffing that was already scheduled, this program was planned and implemented at no cost to the library. Partnering with our Public Affairs Department and using Facebook Live helped streamline the process and keep expenditures to zero.

Day-of-event Activity

We were excited and nervous to try a Facebook Live story time for the first time and on such short notice. The marketing and outreach coordinator from the Public Affairs office, Victoria Nakamura, had borrowed a tripod from Denton Television, the city of Denton municipal television station. She was able to film with just her phone attached to a special attachment on the tripod. This allowed us to have a still shot so so she could monitor and respond to comments on another laptop computer nearby once filming started.

We used white tape to indicate the edge of the frame on her phone before we started so we wouldn't wander outside of the shot during filming. We also filmed a short video and reviewed the sound to make sure our voices were loud enough to be heard on the phone microphone before we went live.

Program Execution

We included nine songs in our first story time, many of which were very active ("Hokey Pokey," "We're Marching Up the Mountain," "Put Your Hands Up High,"

"Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes") as well as songs for more fine motor movements ("Fun With Hands" and "Tommy Thumbs"). I played the instruments and library assistant Anita Savage demonstrated the motions.

Our first story time also had a puppet interaction with a dinosaur. Children were told to say "dinosaur" on the count of three, but every time a different puppet would come out. I would ask what that puppet was and wait for them to answer (think of how they waited for answers on "Blues Clues"). The dinosaur finally did come out.

We also had a storytelling game where I had a hat with character cards and a hat with setting cards, and I weaved a story as I chose different cards from the hats. For every character, there was a puppet or prop behind the stage that would come out. By the time our second story time came around, there was a countywide shelter-in-place order, so I did the second story time solo with one person behind a puppet stage operating the puppets.

By the time of this writing, six days after our first story time, the number of views on the archived Facebook page is over 1,800 views. Considering that parents tuned in with children and that multiple children were in many households, it is safe to say we had thousands of people view the program.

We also had great feedback about how much children loved it, and several parents sent us video of their children interacting with the story time at home. As I write this, one day after our second story time, we have had close to 800 views. As I mentioned a reporter from the public radio station in Dallas enjoyed it so much that she included a radio interview and online article about the program.

Advice

Our first story time was filmed sideways, so viewers had to lock their screens and rotate their devices. Make sure when filming that your own device does not have the locked screen turned on. We fixed this by the second story time, and it is just one of the lessons learned in this new world of virtual programming.

We set up in front of a big window so we had natural lighting on our faces, making sure we had a good shot of the children's area in the background.

It’s also a good idea to have a whiteboard so if someone else is filming they can give you feedback without having to speak on camera.

A craft idea that uses materials people would already have at home is good to offer, preferably something that doesn’t require a printer.

Finally, I printed two pages that had a list of the activities we were doing in order, using big block letters that I could see from across the room. I taped the two pages to a shelving cart, and it helped immensely in keeping me on track with the program.

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

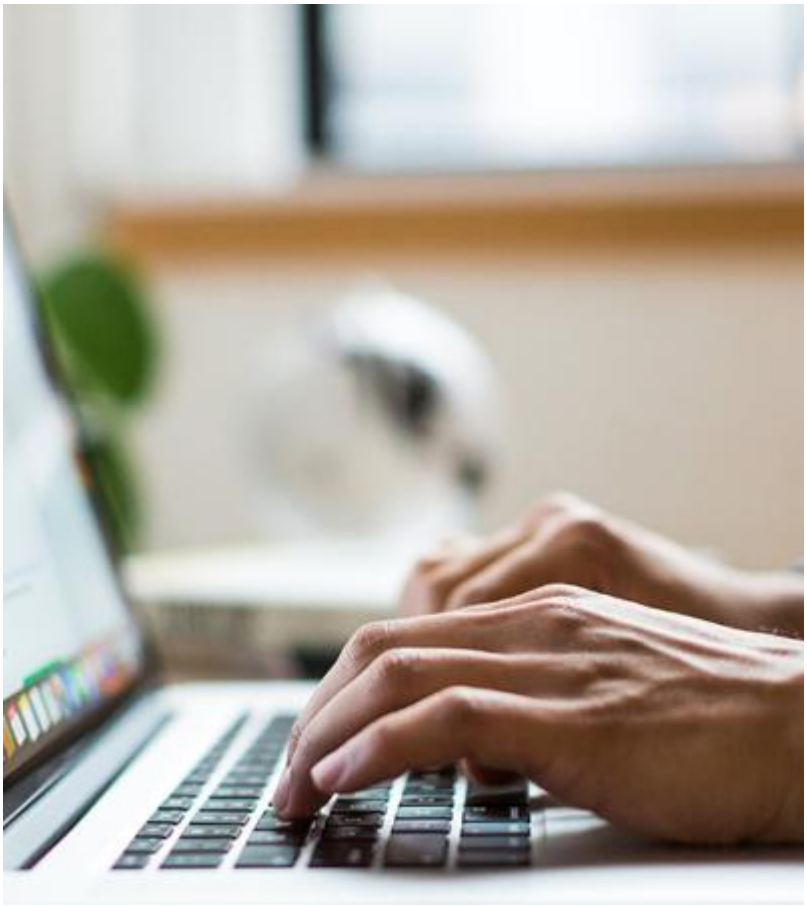
Supporting Materials

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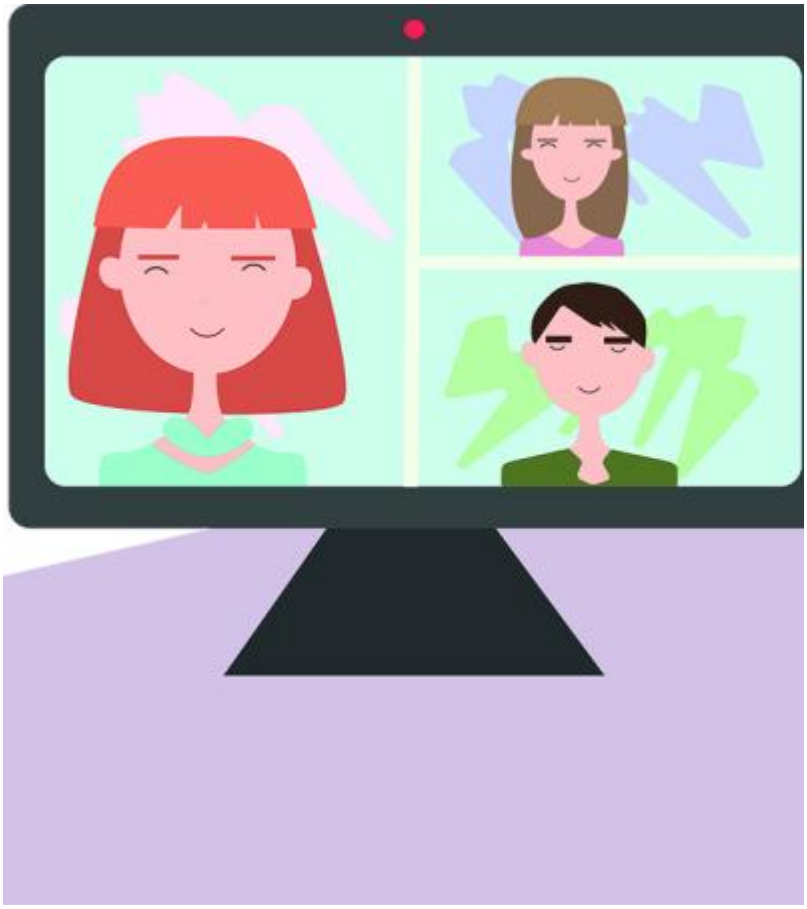
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Children (9 and under)+ | □□
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Online Story Time: It’s Fair Use, Folks

Audiences:

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Book Club Going Virtual?

Audiences:

Audience
Teens (13-16)
Young Adult (17 - 20)
Adults (21 and up)
Intergenerational
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+ |

Book Club Reboot

Audiences: