Regency Dance Class

Winter Park Library

Young Adult

|

Adults

Regency Dance Class

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Free

Byline

Emily McQuade, Public Service Librarian, Winter Park (Fla.) Library

As part of Winter Park Library's *Year with Jane Austen* project, the library hosted a lively two-hour Regency Dance Class led by an instructor from the Jane Austen Society of North America (JASNA). The program began with a brief introduction to Regency-era dance history and basic steps, followed by guided practice on the floor. Designed for beginners and experienced dancers alike, the class required no prior experience or partner. Participants enjoyed stepping into Austen's world of elegant movements that once graced English ballrooms by engaging in an interactive, immersive experience that combined physical activity, cultural enrichment and social interaction.

Advanced Planning

Interest in hosting a Regency dance class was identified early in the planning stages of our *Year with Jane Austen* initiative in mid-2024. After securing a partnership with the Orlando Jane Austen Society of North America (JASNA) chapter, detailed planning for this class began in January 2025. With a seven-month lead time, WPL staff coordinated instructor availability, reserved the community room, finalized logistics and the promotion strategy. To align with the library's mission, three learning outcomes were established:

1. Engagement in Physical Activity. Attendees participated in low-impact physical movement through learning and practicing Regency-era dance steps, which promoted wellness and active recreation.
2. Social Interaction and Community Building. Participants collaborated with others in group dances, which encouraged social connection, teamwork, and a sense of community within the library setting.
3. Cultural and Historical Enrichment. Attendees gained an appreciation for Regency history and culture by exploring the dance traditions of Jane Austen's era, enhancing their understanding through both presentation and practice.

Marketing

The Regency Dance Class was promoted across multiple channels to reach both library patrons and Jane Austen enthusiasts. The program was listed on the library's online event calendar three months in advance and it was highlighted in our monthly printed Event Guide available at the public service desk.

Additional outreach included a feature in the library's monthly email newsletter with a direct registration link, a social media post five days before the event, and targeted promotion to JASNA–Orlando members through their email list and website. These combined efforts proved highly successful, generating above-average social media engagement and resulting in both full pre-registration and strong day-of attendance.

Budgeting

$0, the instructor is a JASNA member and volunteered their time to the library.

Day-of-event Activity

On the day of the program, two staff members spent approximately 45 minutes preparing the library’s community room by clearing the space and arranging chairs along the perimeter to create an open dance floor and places for participants to rest. The instructor’s laptop was connected to the library’s projector and audio system to display dance step visuals and play music.

Program Execution

The session began with a brief PowerPoint introduction covering the history and fundamentals of Regency-era dance. Participants then moved to the floor to practice under the instructor’s guidance, learning steps gradually before joining in group dances. To ensure comfort, attendees were encouraged in advance to wear clothing and shoes that allowed free movement.

Pre-registration reached 75, and 65 participants attended, including several walk-ins. Due to the room size, this was essentially a full class and ideal for maintaining a safe and welcoming environment.

Feedback from attendees and JASNA was overwhelmingly positive, highlighting the accessible instruction and lively atmosphere. The class was so successful that patrons requested additional sessions, especially in anticipation of the Jane Austen Birthday Ball planned for December. The structured format and enthusiastic participation supported an engaging experience that successfully met the library’s goals of encouraging physical activity, fostering social connection, and enriching cultural understanding.

Advice

Schedule similar events well in advance, particularly when coordinating with volunteer instructors. Partnering with local organizations is invaluable; our collaboration with the local Jane Austen Society of North America (JASNA) chapter not only eliminated instructor fees (dance callers often charge $60+ per hour) but also enhanced the program's atmosphere, as many JASNA members attended in Regency attire.

You should also provide ample seating around the dance floor and a water station for participant comfort. Finally, consider offering follow-up or additional classes; our program's popularity led to patron's requesting extra sessions, especially ahead of themed events like the upcoming Jane Austen Birthday Ball. This model is easily adaptable to other themes, including historical or cultural celebrations such as America250.

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

Supporting Materials

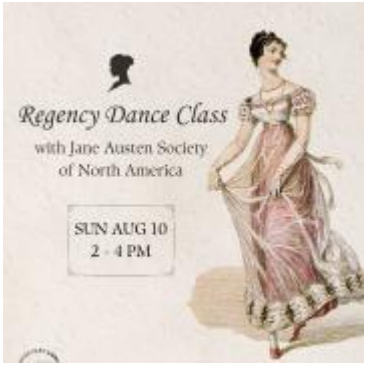
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