Haunted Library

Dover Public Library

Children

|

Young Adult

Haunted Library

Oct 28, 2015

$51-100

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Byline

Liz Strauss, Teen Librarian, Dover (Ohio) Public Library

The Haunted Library is a teen-led program for children ages 8 to 12. Teens help turn part of the library into a maze; hide in it to spook younger kids; lead groups through the maze; and then help with crafts and games in our community room.

Any day close to Halloween will work, but the program works best after-hours. (In 2015, the event will be held on Friday, Nov. 6.) Since we have shorter weekend hours, Fridays and Saturdays are ideal for this type of program at our library. We have a lot of windows, so having it a little later, from 8 to 9 p.m., makes it more fun..

Advanced Planning

Our primary goal for this event was to introduce kids to the teen department through joint programming. We also wanted to give teens an opportunity for community service and leadership experience. Lastly, we wanted to make this a fun event for both tweens and teens, who sometimes miss out on celebrating Halloween as they get older.

The children’s librarian, teen librarian and teen advisory board (called the YA Crew) were involved with the planning of the project. We started in the summer by picking the date, and the details were fleshed out in the fall.

At a monthly YA Crew meeting, we asked for teen volunteers and also reached out to teens who had participated in previous years to see they wanted to help again. This year, teens on the YA Crew asked their friends to join in, as well. In total, we lined up about 10 volunteers.

The first year we did this, the teens did not know what we meant by "maze." Since then, the teen librarian has gotten a head start on the maze before the teens arrived to demonstrate what it’s supposed to look like. (***See Day-of-Event Activities for details.)***

Marketing

We promoted the event through Footnotes, our newsletter, at the end of August. We also sent a press release to local news in mid-October. (**For examples, see "Haunted Library PR" and "Haunted Library Poster" under Attachments at right.)**

Since this is the third or fourth time we’ve had a Haunted Library, children and parents get pretty excited. Our program filled up quickly this year, with about 20 tweens and 10 teen volunteers registered before the press release was even sent.

Budgeting

We spend roughly $50 to $100 on the program, mostly on candy and food for the teen voluteers and prizes for the games. We usually get enough prizes so we have plenty left for the next year. To make the maze, we use a lot of Halloween caution tape, the fake police tape that stores sell around Halloween. Most of the time, this is donated by our teen librarian.

To cut costs, you can ask the teen volunteers to bring snacks and limit the prizes. You can also borrow decorations from staff or make them. If you're careful taking the maze down, you can also save the Halloween caution tape for next time.

Day-of-event Activity

The challenge of this program is setting up the maze in a timely fashion. To help things go smoothly, the teen librarian starts about two hours before the event by putting out footprints that map the path of the maze through the stacks. Then she starts putting up tape to block parts of the path, mostly on the ends of the shelves.

The teen volunteers and children's librarian arrive an hour before the event. Usually the children's librarian takes a couple of teen volunteers to set up crafts and games in the community room. The rest of the teens help finish the maze and set up special areas, like the cardboard graveyard.

If there is time, the teens are allowed to rehearse. The leaders walk the maze with the teen librarian and the volunteers hidden in the maze get to practice what they'll do.

Program Execution

As children arrive, they go to the children's department while waiting to enter the maze. We have coloring pages and puzzles for them to work on while they wait for their turns. The kids are split into groups of about five, according to their age, and are led through the maze. Older groups of kids are allowed to go through the maze alone, by following the footprints. For groups with younger children, they are escorted and the teens are informed ahead of time that they're coming through.

The maze weaves throughout the library and ends in the community room, where we have snacks, games and crafts waiting. The kids get to choose what activities to do, and when the teens get back from haunting the maze, they help run games and hand out prizes.

The event ends at 9 p.m., when parents come to pick up their kids. The teen volunteers stay afterward to help tear down the maze and clean up.

Typically, this event has a tur out of about 30 to 50 people, and the feedback has been very positive.

The children’s and teen librarian meet after the program to discuss what worked and didn't work that year. The teen librarian also talks to the volunteers about how they thought the program went and to gather any suggestions for next time.

Advice

My advice is to definitely mark a path through the maze for your teen volunteers. As previously mentioned, the first year we did this, the teens had no idea what we wanted done or where to go.

There is also no such thing as too much set-up time. Teens will entertain themselves if you finish setting up early and have some wait time before the program starts. It’s far worse to be running late because you had to finish the maze in a hurry.

You should also be clear with the teens on how scary they can be. Our rule is, “don’t make anyone cry.” Tell them ahead of time what ages you’re dealing with and give them guidelines, as needed.

If it’s your first maze, keep it simple. The kids don’t need an elaborate set-up to have fun. They’ll enjoy just being in the library in the dark and after hours.

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

Supporting Materials

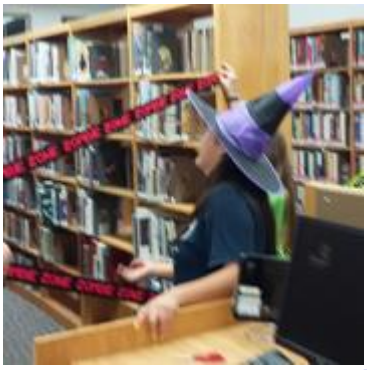
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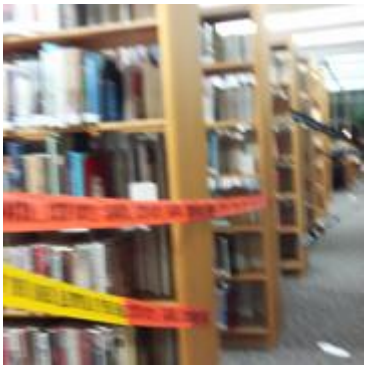
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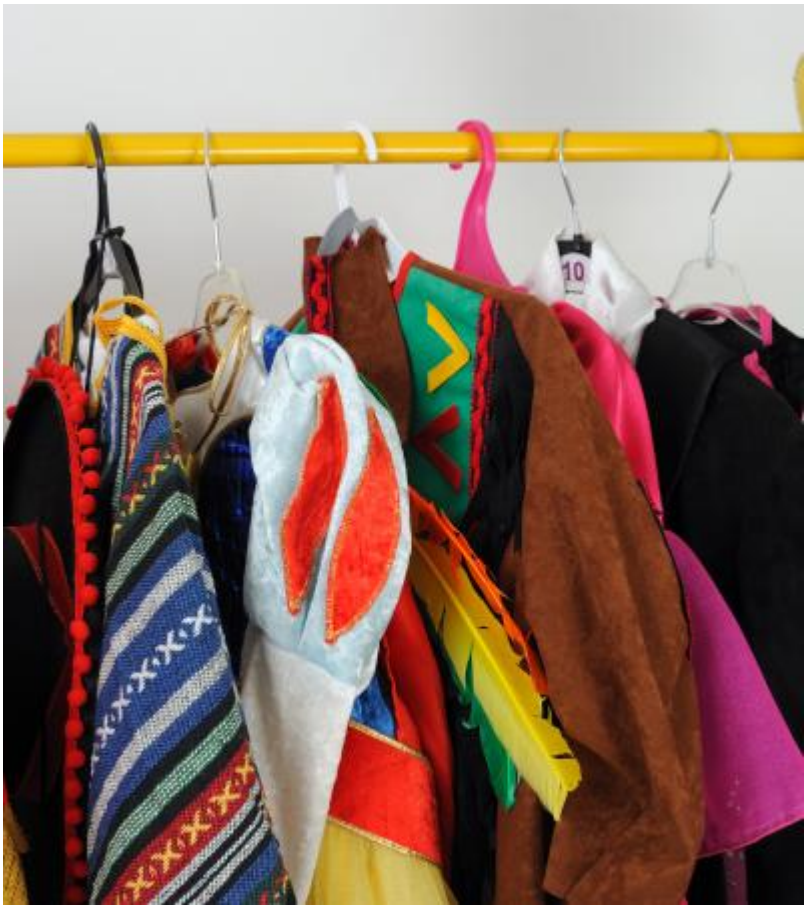
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Great Halloween Costume Swap

Audiences:

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