Escape to Independence

Mountain View Public Library

Intergenerational

Escape to Independence

Jun 26, 2026

$51-100

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Byline

Renee Kitson, Librarian, Mountain View (Calif.) Public Library

Escape to Independence was designed as a self-guided, drop-in escape room that families could complete at their own pace. Instead of requiring scheduled time slots or staff-led facilitation, participants worked through four independent puzzle stations scattered throughout the room.

Each puzzle highlighted a different event or symbol from the American Revolution, including the signing of the Declaration of Independence, Paul Revere's Ride, the Boston Tea Party, and the flag of the original thirteen colonies. Solving each puzzle revealed one digit of a four-digit lock combination. Once participants unlocked the treasure chest, they received a commemorative "History Hero" medal.

The program encouraged observation, collaboration, and historical curiosity while remaining accessible to a wide range of ages.

Advanced Planning

Planning began approximately one month before the program. I wanted to create an activity that celebrated the United States' 250th anniversary while giving families an engaging reason to explore important moments from the Revolutionary era.

I first selected four historical topics that most participants would recognize with a little investigation. Rather than relying on trivia alone, each station required participants to closely examine maps, artwork, or physical objects to discover the answer.

Most of the materials were designed in Canva and printed in-house. The treasure chest, directional signage, and prize medals were assembled during the weeks leading up to the event.

One challenge was balancing puzzle difficulty. I wanted children to experience success while still giving adults something enjoyable to solve. Testing each puzzle with coworkers helped identify clues that needed additional guidance.

Marketing

The escape room was promoted through the library's event calendar, social media, printed flyers, and Summer Reading promotions. Because it was available as a drop-in activity, families could participate whenever it fit their schedule during the event.

The patriotic theme also made it a natural addition to other library celebrations surrounding the nation's 250th anniversary.

Budgeting

Costs included:

1. Combination lock
2. Commemorative medals and ribbon

3. Printing supplies
4. Miscellaneous craft materials
5. Invisible Ink
6. UV Flashlights

Many components were created using existing library supplies, helping keep costs low. The largest expenses, the combination lock and UV flashlights, were one-time purchases that can be reused for future escape rooms and other library programs. Future versions could reduce costs even further by replacing the commemorative medals with stickers, bookmarks, or printable certificates.

Day-of-event Activity

Setup took approximately one hour. The four puzzle stations were arranged around the room with enough space for multiple families to work independently.

Only one staff member was needed to answer occasional questions, reset the stations, and award medals. Because each puzzle was independent, participants naturally spread throughout the room instead of forming long lines.

Program Execution

Participants entered the room, received a brief introduction, and began searching for clues. Each completed puzzle revealed one number needed for the combination lock. Once all four numbers were collected, participants opened the treasure chest and earned a History Hero medal.

The self-guided format worked well because families could collaborate naturally, younger children contributed observations, and adults often helped interpret clues without taking over the experience.

The program successfully transformed historical content into an interactive experience that encouraged teamwork, close observation, and discussion about Revolutionary history.

Advice

Keep the puzzles visual rather than text-heavy. Participants of different ages can contribute when clues rely on observation instead of memorized historical facts.

Design each puzzle so it can be solved independently. This prevents bottlenecks and allows participants to work in whatever order they choose.

Finally, don't overcomplicate the experience. Four short puzzles that build confidence are often more satisfying than one extremely difficult escape room. A small prize at the end adds excitement and provides a memorable conclusion.

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

Supporting Materials

Download this Program as a PDF

- Programming Librarian Facebook Group

Slideshow Images



Image







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Mar 6, 2020
Children (9 and under)+ | □□
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Harry Potter Escape Room (on a $0 Budget)

Audiences:

Children (9 and under)
Tweens (10-12)
Teens (13-16)
Young Adult (17 - 20)
Adults (21 and up)
Intergenerational
May 2, 2025
Young Adult (17 - 20)+ | $$$
Image



The Civic Hub Initiative

Audiences:

Young Adult (17 - 20)
Adults (21 and up)
Sep 9, 2020
Young Adult (17 - 20)+ | $$
Image



Fantasy RPG Escape Room

Audiences:

Young Adult (17 - 20)
Adults (21 and up)