Mr. Wiggles: My Forever Friend and Reading Buddy

BES Media Center

Children

Mr. Wiggles: My Forever Friend and Reading Buddy

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Byline

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Kindergarten students are introduced to the media center through a stuffed animal bookworm named Mr. Wiggles. He is a spin-off from the main character in the "Mr. Wiggle" series written by Paula M. Craig and Carol L. Thompson. This loveable

character fosters reading, writing and communication skills within our youngest learners while building community.

The students take turns bringing this friend home for a one-week stay. They document his adventures by creating a print book or sharing photos/text virtually. When a student returned to the media center class with the Wiggles suitcase after the week-long adventure, the child would present their book to the class using a document camera to project it for all to see.

The school year ends with all kindergarteners receiving their very own Wiggles (uniquely named) with a summer reading journal. When students return as first-graders, they are required to return the summer reading journal, which will provide me with additional data to determine the effectiveness of providing kindergarten students with a reading buddy to encourage summer reading. (This is the first year I sent home a journal to be returned in the fall.)

Advanced Planning

The goal of this program is to foster a love for reading and writing while building community for our youngest learners. In order to plan for this program, I recruited one parent, during mid-summer, to sew two Mr. Wiggles stuffed animals to start the year off (one for each kindergarten class). I had a sample one that I had previously purchased years earlier from a fellow media specialist who used it as a puppet. I also purchased two decorative suitcases from a local craft store and drafted an introduction letter for the parents. The initial funding used to kick off the program was a private donation in the amount of $25.

Mid-spring, I solicited donations from private individuals and the Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) to fund the end-of-year program. (Every kindergartener receives a Mr. Wiggles at the kindergarten celebration in June.) The total costs to sew 40 stuffed animals is approximately $230. Once the funds were secure, I purchased the needed materials and enlisted the support of fifth graders, parents and community members to come to the media center for two 90-minute sewing sessions. Next, I created a summer journal in which the students could record their daily reading with Wiggles, set up a Padlet wall for virtually posting Wiggles sightings, and sent a letter to parents announcing the date of this top-secret event.

During my first media center class with kindergarten students, I read aloud two books from the "Mr. Wiggle" series and then reveal the stuffed animal. I explain to the students that Mr. Wiggles wants to spend time with each student and their family. He loves adventures and thrives on being read to on a daily basis. The suitcase is filled with the laminated letter for the parents, a large Ziploc bag to protect all momentos the students add to it, which document their adventure with Mr. Wiggles. Mr. Wiggles is gently placed in the suitcase and a student is chosen to take him home. It’s a wonderful way to create a safe, loving environment for our youngest students and to share our experiences with this lovable character.

Marketing

The buzz about Mr. Wiggles occurred throughout the year because Bethlehem is a small rural community, and when Mr. Wiggles spent his week with any given student, it was likely they would bring him to one of the town events.

The program promotes itself because the students become so engaged with the weekly adventures their peers shared regarding visits with Mr. Wiggles; all the families (including older siblings in the school) are well aware of this loveable media center mascot.

Prior to the end-of-year kindergarten celebration, I send a letter home sealed in an envelope to each kindergarten parent. The letter informs the parents of the secret event that will take place at the June closing ceremonies. In addition, parents and grandparents who sew or are crafty were invited to attend our workshop sessions. Lastly, I create a short video of the celebration day, and it is shared with the greater community via Twitter, the school’s news link on the BES website and on the media center webpage. **(View the kindergarten celebration video under Videos at right.)**

Budgeting

It costs approximately $10 to $15 to provide one Wiggles kit per classroom. The kit includes a suitcase, a hand-made Wiggles stuffed animal and a gallon-size Ziploc bag to hold mementos from their week together. To make one Wiggles for each

student, it costs approximately $8 per stuffed animal (fabric, glasses, stuffing, thread and felt). Since we had 36 students, we obtained a private donation in the amount of $150 and the PTO donated $100. We had extra fabric leftover for the following year and were able to make two new Wiggles for the next year’s classes.

For cost-cutting, I would suggest offering an adopt-a-Wiggles project in which community members could donate the costs of making one or soliciting donations of the materials necessary to create them.

Day-of-event Activity

The day before the kindergarten celebration, I had the two fifth-grade student helpers for this project display each Wiggles around the library. We cleared off the tops of the bookcases and used the bookstands to support the stuffed animals. The students had previously printed letters for each child and placed them in envelopes addressed to each kindergartener. The envelopes were then taped to the chest of the stuffed animal.

So I could play a two-minute video recapping the year of adventure with Wiggles, I set up a projector, laptop and large screen in the multipurpose room. I also had photocopied a summer journal booklet for each kindergarten student. I took the students' original books about Wiggles and clipped it to a summer reading journal and placed them at tables for parents to pick up. **(View the summer reading journal under Attachments at right.)**

For the actual event, I had just the two fifth-graders assist. Weather was our only variable. For one kindergarten class, we were able to surprise the students by displaying the Wiggles in an outside patio area. This helped to accommodate the large crowd of attendees. However, the second class had their event on a rainy day, which required us to display the 18 Wiggles in the media center.

Program Execution

It made perfect sense to hold this event as part of the annual kindergarten celebration (held in our multipurpose room), which is hosted by the classroom

teacher. Since I was going to surprise all kindergarten students with a Wiggles stuffed animal — to serve as a reading buddy and a reminder to read all summer long — we did not need to do it as a separate event.

A few weeks prior to the celebration, I took a snapshot from one page of each child's book on my iPad. I imported the pictures into iMovie and then, during a media center class, I had each child record their voice narrating the photo. This two-minute movie would serve as the recap of Mr. Wiggles' adventures with BES kindergarteners.

At the end of the celebration, I spoke briefly to the 75 attendees (parents, grandparents and siblings) about our year in media center class. I then shared one of the highlights of the year by showing the video. When the video ended, one of the fifth-grade girls interrupted by informing the crowd that a text message had just come through my phone and they needed to hear it. She proceeded to read the text, which was from Mr. Wiggles. He stated that his entire family was in the media center having a family reunion and was hoping the students would come.

I suggested adults head there first since it sounded like a great photo opportunity. The kindergarten students remained with me when we received a second text from Mr. Wiggles stating that the children were to look for an envelope with their name on it. The students proceeded to media center, and when the doors opened and they saw 18 Wiggles with envelopes attached with their names on them, there were lots of screams and squeals of delight. Once the students read their letters and realized they had been chosen to become a "forever friend" for a niece or nephew of Mr. Wiggles, I gathered all the students together and briefly explained the summer reading journal. The gist of it was that their Wiggles friend gets their energy from being fed books. They are bookworms, after all, and therefore need a steady diet of being read to; the students agreed they would take good care of their new friend and document their reading.

Comment from Maryann Ness, lead teacher and special educator: "Watching kindergarten children and their parents find their very own Mr Wiggles, with a personal message attached, brought tears of happiness to my eyes. This culmination celebration was a sight to behold. As a reader, educator and mother seeing this project bring genuine joy, authentic intrigue and high engagement to children who are just learning to read made my heart sing. The message to read connected to Mr. Wiggles is one these boys and girls will never ever forget."

Advice

I would highly recommend creating a library mascot, such as this one, and let the program continue so that it becomes a tradition. I typically ask the teacher for a recommendation for the first student, since we want to provide a strong model of what the child's documentation of the adventure will look like and since the teachers know the background of the families. This has worked out especially well.

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

Supporting Materials

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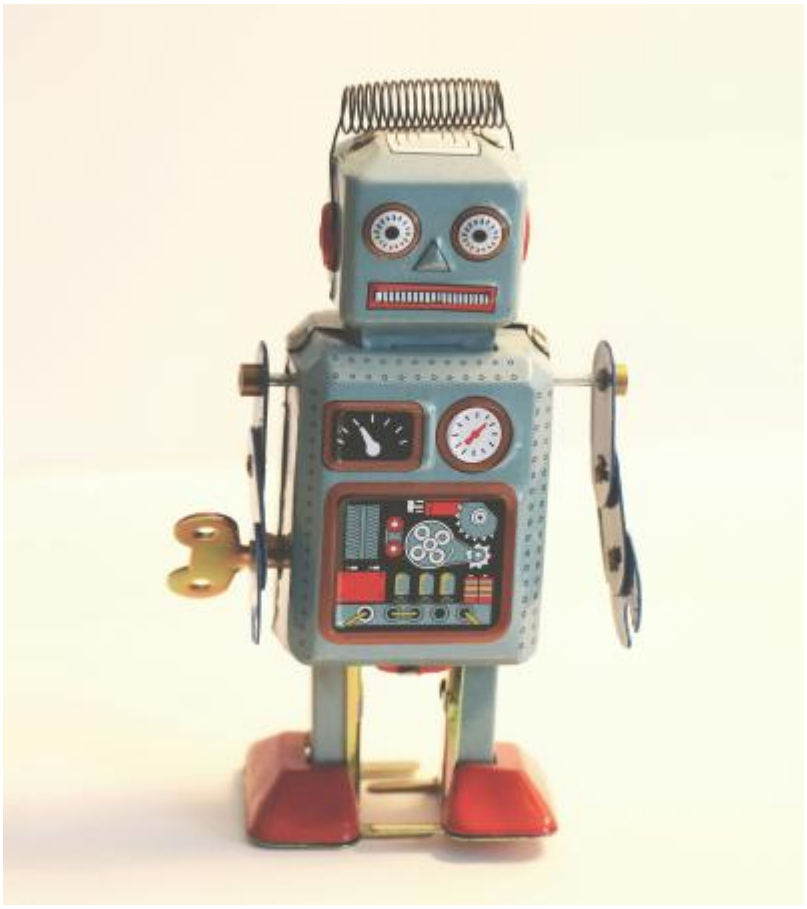
Jun 17, 2010
Children (9 and under)+ |
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Collaboration @ Your School Library

Audiences:

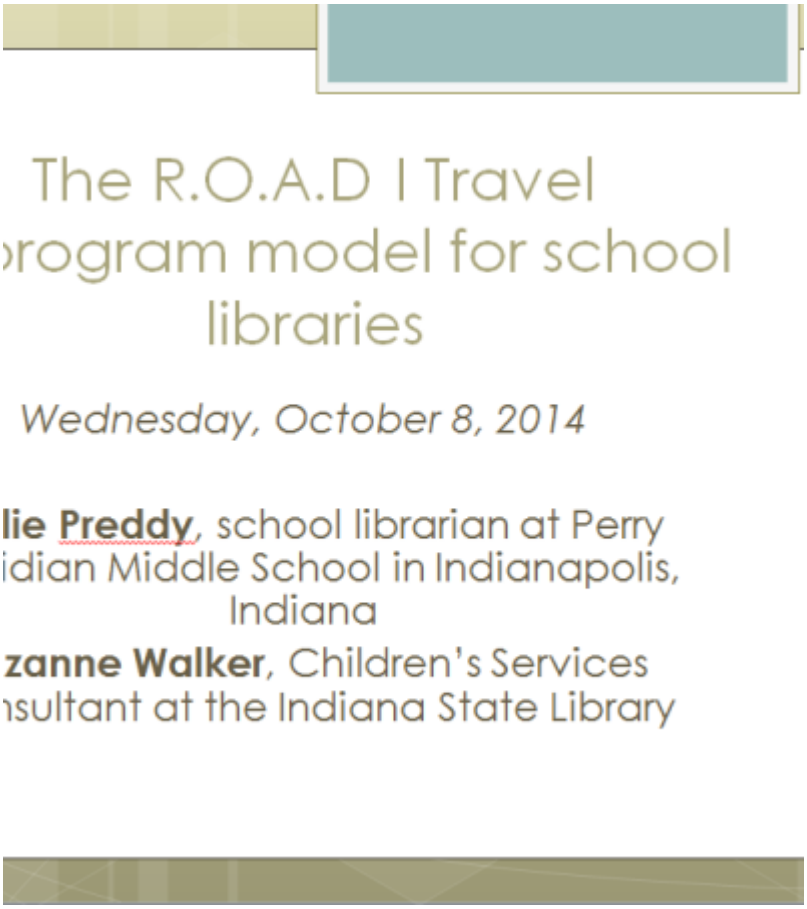
Audience
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The R.O.A.D. I Travel: A Program Model for School Libraries

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ATLAS: At The Library After School

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