

PRESCHOOL STORYHOURS

ORGANIZATION

1. **Participants** - Who will attend the story hour?
 - a. Will this be a program open to all preschoolers, or do you want to limit it to a specific age (e.g. just three year olds)?
 - b. Do you want to leave attendance open, or will closed registration work better in your situation?
 - c. How many children can you handle? This will help you answer the closed vs. open registration question. Generally 15 - 20 children in a group works the best, although if you are expecting mostly older preschoolers (4's and 5's), you can take more, and some people actually deal with 100 kids at a time!
 - d. Are the parents invited to attend (in which case they should participate) or do you want to have just the children? Including parents and caregivers is a great way to model reading aloud, selecting appropriate books, using songs and fingerplays, talking about books and other early literacy activities.
2. **The setting** - where will you have it?
 - a. Choose a quiet corner away from as many distractions as possible.
 - b. Decide on seating arrangements: mats, chairs or a carpet.
3. **The time** - when and for how long will it be held?
 - a. How long will each program last? Guidelines for length of individual programs: 20 – 30 minutes for book and fingerplay programs for young preschoolers; 30 - 60 minutes for multimedia programs for older preschoolers.
 - b. How many programs in a session?
 - c. What day of the week and what time of the day? Don't forget working parents when planning programs.
 - d. Some people have storytime every week of the year, but I strongly recommend breaking the programs up into a series of sessions, with a break in between.

PLANNING THE PROGRAMS

1. Decide if your storyhours will have a unifying theme (e.g. farms or bears). The advantage to themes is it makes it easier for the storyteller to choose appropriate fingerplays, crafts and activities. The disadvantage is that sometimes a book is chosen because it fits the theme rather than because it's a great book to share with children.
2. The selection of stories is the most important part of your planning. Choose stories you really enjoy. Browse through your library's shelves, and consult standard lists of stories for suggestions. Look for the following when choosing a picture book:
 - **Books with a simple plot that young children can relate to.**
 - **A good balance of pictures and text.**
 - **Large clear pictures, preferably in bright colors.**
 - **Ones that lend themselves easily to early literacy activities.**
3. Include participation books (i.e. books that require the children to interact with the storyteller such as guessing game books, books with sounds, or lift-the-flap books) in your programs.
4. Select songs, fingerplays, poems and action rhymes to use in between books. Plan activities that include word play – an important component of early literacy.
5. Talk about the books you use. Introduce them and relate the story to the children's lives. (e.g. after reading *The Snowy Day* ask, "What do you like to do in the snow?"). Do not ask yes and no questions, and do not make the conversation into a quiz. Always read aloud the author, title and illustrator of every book you read, pointing to the words.
6. Choose an opening and closing for the story hour so children will see a form and become comfortable with it. Possibilities include a simple fingerplay or song, or a puppet which always introduces the story hour.
7. Consider using some "extras" in your programs such as:
 - Creative drama or movement
 - Science and math activities
 - Recorded music
 - Live music
 - Games
 - Puppets
 - DVDs
 - Crafts
 - Apps
 - Flannel boards
 - Name tags

8. Be sure you are completely familiar with everything you are going to use in the story time. Read the books over to yourself, and then out loud until you know them well. Memorize only a song or repeated refrain, not the whole story. Listen to your voice: speak clearly, slowly and naturally, and do not try to do a different voice for each character (exceptions would be witches, monsters, etc.). Know the songs and fingerplays that you are going to present thoroughly.
9. Be flexible! Prepare more than you plan to use, and be ready to substitute, add or subtract at a moment's notice. Let the responses of the group guide you, not a set-in-stone plan.
10. After the story hour, encourage the children to select books to take home. Spend time helping children with their book selection and provide the parents with lists of good books for preschoolers. You may want to pull out a selection of books on the same topic, or just ones you highly recommend to make the family's choices easier.

Most important, relax and enjoy your storytelling!

Grace W. Greene
Youth Services Consultant
Revised 2013