



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“People’s dreams are made out of what they do all day. The same way a dog that runs after rabbits will dream of rabbits. It’s what you do that makes your soul, not the other way around.”

-Barbara Kingsolver,
writer

This is the time of year when children’s librarians are finalizing their summer events. At most libraries, this will include some sort of summer reading program for children, with a theme like dragons or magic or, depending on the summer, the Olympics. Every year, there are discussions among these librarians about how to count reading time: Should it be by minutes or pages or by number of books? The topic of prizes also comes up: What should they be? Should there be any at all? Game boards are designed, graphics are chosen, and the topic of sponsors is thoroughly examined.

The Alameda County and Contra Costa County library systems, as well as Berkeley, Oakland and San Leandro Public libraries, are part of a consortium called the Collaborative Summer Reading Program (CSRP). This national organization combines 32 state agencies and associations and together they choose a

theme, develop a manual, research artists and put together a summer reading program kit for all participants.

This year’s theme is Dragons, Dreams and Daring Deeds and Steven Kellogg, a popular children’s illustrator, created the artwork. This cooperative was started in Minnesota in 1987 and it is a good example of ways libraries can work together to save money and create programs. Other states, like Massachusetts, have statewide cooperatives that work the same way – libraries pooling information and resources to expand their programs and introduce families all over the state to their local library and its summer activities.

Of course, there are many, many libraries that are independently developing their own summer reading games and program themes. And they also put together simple or elaborate programs, celebrating the free hours and extended

daylight children and parents enjoy during the summer.

The other component of summer programming is the entertainment. I recently went to something called the Performers’ Showcase, which was held at the San Leandro Public Library. This one-day event provides an opportunity for librarians to watch shortened versions of performances for children and to meet the performers. It is a full and exhausting day, and a great idea.

Until I became a children’s librarian, I hadn’t realized just how much time and thought goes into scheduling these entertainers. Nor had I realized how many of them there are, although as the brochures started arriving in the mail in December, it was beginning to become clear to me. It is amazing to see the range of acts, all geared toward engaging and possibly even

educating young children.

At the Showcase there were magicians, clowns, pigs (real ones), a dog, musicians, puppeteers, more magicians, more puppeteers, storytellers and more. The audience was almost entirely made up of adults, with a handful of children, whom I assume had come with their parents. The children’s reaction to the various acts wasn’t always the same as the reaction of the adults and it was interesting to notice the differences.

I took lots of notes on the supplied brochures and fliers, but even so it has been a challenge to distinctly remember each act. And as I create my first summer program, I am conscious of trying to provide a summer library experience for all kinds of children. I want there to be the large-scale entertainment of a true puppet show, but also the simple and low-key experience of a music-

ian and her instrument. I think it is exposure like this that gives each child a new view of the public library and an unforgettable experience.