



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
August 24, 2007

"In August

it will be so hot

I will become

a cooking pot

cooking soup of course.

Why not?

Cooking once

cooking twice

cooking chicken soup

with rice."

-From Maurice Sendak's
Chicken Soup with Rice

As my third summer as a children's librarian winds down, I have been thinking about summer reading games. We actually have three of these going on this summer: one for children, a teen one and an adult one.

The teen game requires 25 hours of reading for the first prize and 50 for the final one. That's a lot of reading, but for the teens I think it's reading that would be done no matter whether there is a game or not.

The adult reading game includes a weekly raffle and then a final drawing at the end. This year's theme is "Mystery in the Big City" and people enter the contest by filling out an entry blank with the title of the book and the author. The weekly prizes are gift certificates for See's and Peet's and so far they seem to be equally appealing. This game has been popular and our display table of mysteries is constantly being replenished.

The children's summer

reading game is the most complex. Alameda County is again using a nationwide theme, this time "Get a Clue at Your Library." The graphics for the game boards and the posters were created by Mark Teague, who is a children's author and illustrator. However, I don't think the allure of the game is in the pictures or even the theme. In fact, it would probably be equally appealing for children if it were simply a black and white sheet of paper. Because it is the game that draws in the children.

The concept is simple: read for half an hour and then record it - this year, by coloring in a magnifying glass. The reading can be done in various ways: by the child alone, by a parent or other adult reading aloud, or even by an older sibling (that counts double, because both the listener and the reader get credit). And the material can be anything on paper - books, magazines, comic books or anything else they might

continued on page 2

think of. The idea is to encourage reading.

Then, the child brings in his or her game board and spins a spinner for each half hour recorded. The spinner has only ones and twos on it, so for each half hour a child moves either one or two squares by stamping the appropriate number of times on the trail. Eventually (after 30 squares), the first prize is reached. Thirty squares later comes the final prize.

It is a long road to read down, potentially 30 hours of reading to the end, if only ones are spun. Every day, as I watch them spin, I think about reading for 30 minutes to spin once and then getting only a one. But I have never seen a child look discouraged by spinning ones, even 5 in a row. I am impressed by the pleasure they get in simply spinning and stamping.

I have always had mixed feelings about giving children rewards for something they

enjoy - it seems like it could take away from the innate pleasure of whatever it is, like reading. However, this summer has been a good lesson for me. Not only do the children seem to enjoy the process more than the rewards, but I have seen children quietly watch the game being played and then later ask me for a game board, too. Recently, I even had a child get a game board, pick a book from the shelf, read for thirty minutes in the children's area and return to me to spin. His mother was impressed.