

Storytime and Crafts – the Backbone of Libraries

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Ask any library user to relay their first memory of the library and there is a good chance it has to do with Pre-School Storytime. My first library memories are walking to the Umatilla County Library (now Pendleton Center for the Arts), and listening to stories read by the fireplace in the Children's area that was housed there. We would haul home an armload of books, enough to last until our next visit. These outings and Storytimes lead to a love of reading that follows me today.

Many public libraries today run a huge variety of programs from coding to robotics, to adult cookbook book clubs. However, the "original" library program was pre-school story time, and it remains a staple at most public libraries today. Pre-school Storytimes have been standard in libraries for decades because the data behind children being exposed to words, stories and books early in life is solid. Data and research show that early exposure to books and reading heavily predict long-term academic success, school readiness, and reading comprehension.

At the Pilot Rock Public Library, Susan Price has partnered with the pre-school Pilot Rock Elementary School offer to run a successful weekly pre-school story and craft time. Marcy Jerome, the pre-school teacher at Pilot Rock Elementary School, walks her class down to the library each week to have Susan read books and teach a craft related to the books she reads. This relationship has led to an uptick in the summer reading participating in Pilot Rock as students ask their parents to bring them to the library. Even when the weather is poor, Marcy will bring the students down by school bus to participate in the Storytime. Programs like these are particularly important for kids at a young age as their brain development is much better suited to learning via listening to spoken words, and seeing letters and words on a page, then screen-based learning. Pre-school story times not only offer children social interactions and learning, but they are also a place for new moms to find peers in the same (often exhausted state) they are in, and to make life-long friends in the process.



The late, and beloved, Dolly Parton knew the value of getting books into the hands of children. Her father, “the smartest man she knew”, could not read; and because of this Dolly had a lifelong desire to get books into the hands of children. Starting in her home county and the state of Tennessee, Dolly created a foundation to mail books, every month, to children from birth to age 5. Her goal was for every child to have a library of their very own in their home. This dream has grown into a program that now mails over 3 million books to children around the world every month. The State of Oregon legislature recently signed into law that 50% of this funding would come from the State itself to promote early literacy. Every child in Oregon is covered, free to the child’s family, if they sign up. In Umatilla County, the other 50% comes from the United Way of the Blue Mountains, and around the State other United Way chapters, private donors, non-profits, and good old fashion fundraising ensure any child in Oregon can receive a free book every month until their 5th birthday. As Dolly is quoted to have said “you can never get enough books into the hands of enough children!” Libraries, schools, caregivers, and the Dolly Parton Imagination Library are all working towards the same goal. Get books into the hands of kids from the beginning and see them grow. They are our future! To learn more about all the libraries in Umatilla County visit www.ucslid.org. To learn about the Dolly Parton Imagination Library and sign up a child under age 5 visit www.imaginationlibrary.com.