Effective school libraries are no longer quiet, staid places—and the inclusion of preschoolers adds even more joy and active learning to the mix. As more and more elementary schools include preschool children in their school communities, school librarians can respond with programs that emphasize essential early literacy experiences for the very young.

It’s the school librarians’ responsibility and pleasure to welcome these young children into the library and develop programming that provides them with beginning literacy experiences. Such programming can create building blocks for success in reading throughout their entire educational experience.

A major part of the mission of the school library is to promote and encourage literacy. School librarians can focus on guiding these very young students in ways that foster early learning. Many children begin school today at a disadvantage. They may not have been read to on a regular basis, and many have never been to a library. School librarians can make books fun for these students and introduce them to the whole new world ahead of them!

It is important for school librarians to introduce themselves to the early childhood educators in their schools by inviting them to visit the school library and look at the available resources. They can also make plans for story time with the students and collaborate to build a foundation for early literacy. This article will focus on the ingredients needed for a successful preschool library experience.

 Welcoming Atmosphere

Creating an inviting and accessible environment is important to make books appealing to preschoolers. Low bookshelves are necessary for easy access and brightly colored baskets are a great way to organize board books. Preschoolers can decorate the library by coloring pictures of favorite book characters for display in their special area.

A school library for young students should have book characters, puppets, and other stuffed animals. These can be found at thrift stores or garage sales for an insignificant cost. Every season Kohl’s department store offers Kohl’s Cares for Kids merchandise for the low cost of five dollars each for featured stuffed book characters and matching hardcover books.

Learning the names of preschool students is a simple thing that can make a big difference in making them feel welcome in the library. Students could wear name tags for their first several visits. As they are checking out books, students can say their names aloud. This also provides practice for them in speaking and conversing with an adult.

 Choosing Books for Preschoolers

Story time with preschoolers is an opportunity for school librarians to nurture children emotionally and academically. Some special considerations should be made in choosing books to read aloud. Young children like repetition and predictability. It’s fun to read books that let them make educated guesses about what is going to happen next. Rhythmic language also appeals to preschoolers and gives them an opportunity to recite part of the book as it is read.

Appealing illustrations are also important considerations when selecting books for young children. These illustrations can be springboards for conversation during the read-aloud. Children might notice the character’s facial expressions and describe how the character is feeling and why.

Folk tales, traditional stories, and trickster stories are all good choices for read-alouds. They help provide students with a cultural context, as well as portray universal themes. They are also useful for making comparisons between stories.

Preschoolers like to hear books about experiences that are relevant to them. Stories about making friends, riding the school bus, going to the doctor, celebrating a birthday, and checking out books from the library are examples of topics they might find interesting.

 Creating the Space

The story time area should give young children enough space to sit without being crowded, but not be too far away from the books being shared. An easel or shelf that displays big books while being read is a useful addition. It’s important to give children time to study
the illustrations and talk about details they see.

A flannel board can also be used in this way. Children may enjoy retelling a story using flannel board pieces.

It is important for children to have easy access to the adults in the library. Sitting on the floor with adults after check-out gives children time to share the books they’ve chosen, make comments about them, and enjoy a cozy time together.

Reading the Stories

Using book characters or stuffed animals provides an introduction to a book that is sure to pique the interest of preschoolers. Flannel boards and puppets are also great ways for kids to interact with the story.

Various adults, administrators, school nurse, secretaries, and other school personnel can be invited to read aloud with preschool students. This is a way to get students excited about books while also building relationships with adults in the school building. Hosting a variety of readers conveys the message to children that reading is for everyone.

Strategies for Reading Aloud

It is helpful to use visual cues with preschoolers when reading aloud to them. This is especially true when the story includes unfamiliar vocabulary words. In “The Three Billy Goats Gruff,” the reader can show children what it looks like when the goats “trip-trap” across the bridge.

Readers can point out text to children and use a finger to follow along. This helps them make the connection between the print and the words being read. Using a lot of expression is the fun part of reading aloud! Readers can keep children interested in the story and also provide context clues for them through voice inflection.

As children prepare to check out books, school librarians can extend the conversation by stating the book’s title and pointing out some interesting parts of the cover illustration. A simple question relating to the title or cover may also spark the student’s interest. Modeling these simple responses to literature can enhance children’s enjoyment and understanding of a book.

Making a Difference

Experiencing the joy of reading with preschool children is a highly rewarding experience. Young children are enthusiastic, eager to participate, and learning all the time. The time devoted to creating these positive experiences with young children is time well spent. With a little planning and an inviting attitude, all school librarians can provide a delightful and meaningful introduction to the library for even the youngest members of the school community.

Resources:

Julie Tegeler is a library media specialist at Pershing Elementary for Lincoln Public Schools in Lincoln, NE. Email: jtegeler@lps.org

Martha Schwindt is a library media specialist at Meadow Lane Elementary for Lincoln Public Schools in Lincoln, NE. Email: mschwin@lps.org
About storytime preschool. Our Story. ‘When We Play, We Learn’ is our motto! I cannot recommend Storytime school enough; we love this school! Our five year old son has been at this marvelous school for almost two years already and his little brother joined him a few months ago. The school’s motto ‘when we play we learn’ is so true! We are in awe of how the school and its fantastic teachers and assistants use play and creativity to impart education and learning. Kids are taught key subjects such as reading, writing, mathematics, science, but it is all taught through play and games which makes learning fun and easy for them. My two boys are super excited to go to school every single morning and come home so happy.