
Author Schatzkamer-Miller has drawn on her many years of experience conducting storytime for preschoolers in bookstores and community centres to create The storytime handbook. The book is intended to be a complete guide to conducting a themed storytime experience that includes books, crafts, games and snacks. The introduction details the components of a 60-minute storytime session, with instructions on how to create a shorter session if required, as well as providing practical advice on engaging with preschoolers and conducting a successful session. For each of the 52 themes that follow, organised by month, the author provides guidance on advance planning and preparation, how to introduce the theme of the storytime, suggested songs, games, crafts, snacks, and, of course, books. A suggested books list of up to 50 titles accompanies each theme, revealing the author’s long-standing interest in children's literature. The 52 themes arranged by month are followed by a list of useful websites, a storytime planning template, suggested reading for additional storytime resources, and an index which will be of most use when one has gained familiarity with the book’s contents. Familiarity will be useful when using the index, where entries are composed primarily of song and activity names.

The fact that the author does not have a library background is reflected in her suggestions of how to source the music and books for each session, where she states that although libraries might hold classics, bookstores and the Internet are the better places to source newer materials. Librarians may well disagree and are well placed to find and use the up-to-date music and books held by their own and neighbouring institutions rather than relying on commercial sources as suggested. Australian and New Zealand librarians may also find that the themes do not match Southern Hemisphere seasons (the ‘Spring’ theme appears in March, for example, and ‘Autumn Leaves’ in September), but this is to expected from an American publication and can easily be accommodated.

Experienced storytime librarians will benefit from the themed organisation of ideas and may find inspiration for their own storytimes. Librarians who are new to storytime or to working with children will benefit most from the advice given in the introduction about working with preschoolers and managing groups of small children. Although the crafts and activities suggested in each theme of The storytime handbook will be informed by an organisation’s budget, and the snacks possibly irrelevant in ‘no-food allowed’ places, the book will be a useful resource for any storytime librarian, especially for one who would rather face a severely disgruntled adult library patron than a roomful of rambunctious little ones. With this book at hand storytime can be easy to plan and prepare and need not be a stressful experience for anyone.

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