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Local libraries host summer reading programs

By Casey Scheiner



Laura Bruggink (center) reads to Lana and Luca Morgan. Photo Casey Scheiner

As the calendar turns to June, children turn away from the classroom to the green grass, blue sky, and freedom that summer brings. Nonetheless, though school may be out, student reading interest and participation remains high in large part due to efforts from Lamorinda libraries, namely with their summer reading programs.

"My daughter Annabelle reads about 20 minutes a day during the summer. She loves the stories and learning how to read," Ana Ramirez, a local parent, said. "The library has been a great resource for us because it has a lot of books at her level in both English and Spanish."

The library offers a number of programs to push local children to read as much as they can over the summer. The most notable is the Summer Reading Passport, in which kids can receive free books and enter drawings for larger prizes by denoting on their reading passport that they read and did outdoor activities that fit with the year's theme of "Read Beyond The Beaten Path," such as going for a hike or drawing a picture of nature.

Additionally, the libraries typically host in-person events such as Storytimes and Paws To Read, a program where kids can read to a dog, though such events were canceled for this June due to COVID-19 concerns. Plus, the Contra Costa libraries provide many online resources on their website, from a free subscription to National Geographic Kids to reading lists tailored to specific age groups.

Some of the child reading lists seek to highlight diverse cultures, with collections of books that pay homage to the LGBTQ+ community or celebrate Asian-American/Pacific Islander month. Indeed, the importance of such programs cannot be overstated. A study from Scholastic found that in a phenomenon known as the "summer slide," students lose an average of 20% of their school-year gains in reading from June to August. So, to mitigate the negative effects that summer break can have on learning, Contra Costa libraries push students to read during the summer.

"The library is getting kids to read 20 to 40 minutes per day, which is very important since some of them are reading less than they used to and gravitating more towards [devices]," Joshua Tong, a volunteer at the Orinda Library explained. "It's also fun for the kids because they get to read cool books and potentially win prizes."

What draws students to the library is not the "educational benefits" that psychology studies and education leaders tout, but the sheer fun of reading. A poll from the National Literacy Trust corroborated that approximately 6 of 10 children said they enjoyed reading "quite a bit" or "a lot."

"I love reading, especially flipping to the next page to find out what happens next because many of my favorite books have cliffhangers," Shay D, a rising fourth-grader summarized. "At the library I've checked out many books from my favorite authors."

This summer, kids around Lamorinda are not just soaking up the sun, but the magic of books, as local libraries continue to feed their intellectual curiosity.

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