

# PAST WINNING LIBRARIES

- Alfred H. Baumann Public Library, Passaic County
- Bernardsville Public Library, Somerset County
- Cherry Hill Public Library, Camden County
- Franklin Township Free Public Library, Somerset County
- Hilton Branch Public Library, Maplewood Memorial Library, Essex County
- Jersey City Free Public Library, Hudson County
- Lake Hiawatha Branch of the Parsippany-Troy Hills Public Library, Morris County
- Mary Jacobs Branch Library, Somerset County Library System, Somerset County
- Matawan-Aberdeen Public Library, Monmouth County
- Middletown Township Public Library, Monmouth County
- Monroe Township Public Library, Middlesex County
- Moorestown Public Library, Burlington County
- Mt. Tabor Branch Library, Parsippany Troy-Hills Public Library, Morris County
- Princeton Public Library, Mercer County
- Somerset County Library System, Somerset County
- South County Branch, Camden County Library System, Camden County
- Swedesboro Branch Library, Gloucester County Library System, Gloucester County
- Watchung Public Library, Somerset County Library System, Somerset County



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2015 EDITION THE FIFTH ANNUAL REPORT ON THE

# BEST PRACTICES IN EARLY LITERACY PROGRAMS

TO NEW JERSEY'S YOUNGEST LIBRARY USERS, THEIR FAMILIES AND CAREGIVERS



NEW JERSEY STATE LIBRARY



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FRANKLIN TOWNSHIP FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY, SOMERSET COUNTY *for the*

# The Reading Connection Program

“Parents frequently ask how to help their children learn to read or improve their emerging reading skills,” commented Anne Lemay, head of youth services. *The Reading Connection* began as an experiment: Why not feature one letter per program to give children a chance to experience it hands on? The program, geared for children between 3 ½ - 8 years old, lets them explore one letter of the alphabet through writing, math and science activities, making artistic creations, movement and story. A letter is chosen for each program, and all activities feature that letter, beginning with a story, such as Esphyr Slobodkina’s *Caps for Sale* for the letter “C,” followed by songs and book discussion. Five or six activity stations are set up and labeled with signs that feature the letter in upper and lower case, and tell what to do at each station. Vocabulary words are included on some signs, while others feature directions that allow the child to become familiar with following printed directions, and make the connection between the printed word and subsequent actions. Parents and children work together at each station and are encouraged to talk

about what they are doing. A writing station is always set up so children can make little books using stamps, ink and colored pencils. A math station might feature counting, patterning or tangram activities, while a science one might show children various ways to make ice melt, the properties of magnets or how to make oceans in a bottle. Craft stations give the children an opportunity to make something, too. Sometimes an activity features movement, such as newspaper dancing or puppetry. *The Reading Connection* was an immediate hit. “One parent commented that she was inspired now to do activities like this at home,” Lemay added.



# Early Literacy Skills Critical to Long-Term Success in Life

Studies have shown that reading aloud to young children is the single most effective thing parents can do to help prepare their children to succeed in the future. Public libraries are vital because the librarians know that achieving proficiency in early literacy skills is critical to a child’s success in school and beyond.

Each year the New Jersey State Library recognizes four public libraries for their Best Practices in Early Literacy Programs. All of these libraries offer fun, easily executed and replicated early literacy programs in their communities for children from birth to age six.

*New Jersey Kids Count*, a project of Advocates for Children of New Jersey, funded by the Anne E. Casey Foundation, annually produces a snapshot of the well-being of New Jersey’s children.

According to 2014 *Kids Count* data, 58 percent of 4th graders are below proficient in their reading achievement level. New Jersey’s low-income 4th graders fared even worse, with 78 percent scoring below proficient on national literacy tests. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) defines proficient as a solid performance that demonstrates competency over the subject matter. Since 2003, the achievement gap between New Jersey’s low-income students and their wealthier peers grew 3 percent, according to the report.

In acknowledging the need for their libraries’ youngest users to achieve reading proficiency, public libraries are providing an essential service by offering books and other helpful resources. New Jersey’s public libraries continue to lead the way in encouraging good reading habits by hosting story hours and other programs that model reading for the children and their parents and caregivers. All of these experiences show the children that the library is a fun and welcoming place to be, while at the same time, building a solid foundation for learning to read.

As the State Librarian, I applaud these public libraries on their exceptional programs that highlight some of the best early literacy programs currently being offered around the state.

All of the programs here show that it’s not the size or budget of the library that counts, but the desire of these libraries to encourage young children to experience the joy of reading.

My sincerest congratulations to all!



MARY L. CHUTE  
State Librarian of New Jersey

# 2015 BEST PRACTICES IN EARLY LITERACY PROGRAMS WINNING LIBRARIES

CHERRY HILL PUBLIC LIBRARY *for the Busy Bags Program*

OTTO BRUYNS PUBLIC LIBRARY, NORTHFIELD *for the B.Y.O.B. (Bring Your Own Baby) Program*

WATCHUNG PUBLIC LIBRARY, A BRANCH OF THE SOMERSET COUNTY LIBRARY SYSTEM *for the Mini-Maker Art Space Program*

FRANKLIN TOWNSHIP FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY, SOMERSET COUNTY *for the The Reading Connection Program*

CHERRY HILL PUBLIC LIBRARY *for the*

## *Busy Bags Program*

At the Cherry Hill Public Library, parents are often looking for ways to reinforce early literacy practices at home. The circulating *Busy Bags* were created to help fill this need by providing simple yet engaging learning activities for toddlers and preschoolers that can be checked out and used outside of the library. *Busy Bags* provide parents with structured activities to do with their child while also helping to educate parents about early learning skills that their child should be developing. Research indicates that one of the most important ways young children learn language is through play. The *Busy Bags* support early learning skills through puzzles, games and constructive play. They provide caregivers with examples for how to enhance playtime and encourage a child's natural curiosity. Each *Busy Bag* activity is stored in its own bag so that it can be checked out and used during quiet time at home or to keep busy while on trips. *Busy Bags* are made from simple materials which make them cost-effective to create and maintain. For example, one *Busy Bag* consists of twenty Duplo® blocks and laminated pattern

cards. Children are encouraged to replicate the color patterns in the towers they build. Each bag is labeled with the skill being developed (such as sequencing, pattern recognition or phoneme awareness) and a recommended age range. Patrons are often seen using the bags in the library, providing quiet play time after a story time. "*Busy Bags* are so easy to use," said Sapna Kaul, a library patron. Kaul uses the bags with her 2 ½ year old. "I don't have to research anything or print anything out. I can really see that they help my child with her motor skills and my kid is having fun at the same time."

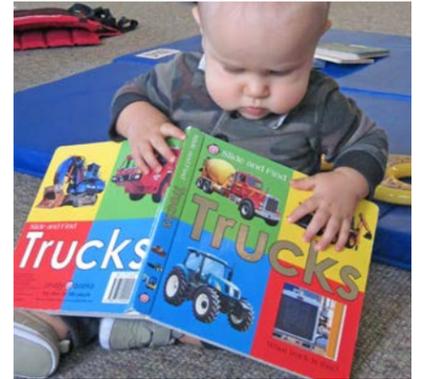


OTTO BRUYNS PUBLIC LIBRARY, NORTHFIELD *for the*

## *B.Y.O.B. (Bring Your Own Baby) Program*

*B.Y.O.B. (Bring Your Own Baby)* is a weekly program for caregivers and infants 18 months and younger that incorporates world music, musical instruments, hand play, puppetry, reading and social interaction to stimulate babies. Aubrey Gerhardt, library director, said, "In Northfield and in the surrounding neighborhoods in Atlantic County there is practically nothing caregivers can do with an infant for free. As a woman who was a stay-at-home mother in this community, I knew that there was a need for educational and social opportunities for babies in the region." Though inspired by the "Baby Bounce" program offered at the Atlantic City Free Public Library, the staff updated the program with a few key elements and a bit of kitschy style that they hope to expand upon in 2015. Infant-safe instruments are laid out on mats purchased just for use for *B.Y.O.B.* As everyone gathers, Putumayo World Music plays. The program begins with a "hello everybody" song, followed by hand play and then an energetic song to "shake the sillies out." Staff then reads bright and interesting board books, giving the babies the chance to see the pages

up close and touch the book or turn a page. There are no sign-ups, no pressure to be on time and no consequence for skipping a week. The staff believes that continuing to provide such high quality programming for free will encourage more non-library users in the community to come to the library giving their children a more rounded educational experience. Parents love the program. Amanda Munyon, a parent of a 14-month old infant said, "He gets to learn to interact and be respectful of others. He spends time reading and singing. The class also teaches him how to be patient during story times...I also learn different techniques of teaching to increase his learning."



WATCHUNG PUBLIC LIBRARY, A BRANCH OF THE SOMERSET COUNTY LIBRARY SYSTEM *for the*

## *Mini-Maker Art Space Program*

Watchung Public Library was inspired to create a *Mini-Maker Art Space* because studies show that expressive arts can foster emergent reading through symbols, feelings and words. It is a self-directed space for children from preschool through second grade where they, their siblings and parents can create. A display sign describes the theme in the *Mini-Maker Art Space*, along with basic background information and directions for a particular project. Most projects can be completed in about 20 minutes, although some families stay longer. A wide assortment of art supplies are provided, depending on the project, including various types of papers, markers, collage materials, decorative embellishments and building materials for sculptures. The *Mini-Maker Art Space* has been multi-generational. Inspiration pieces may include samples of similar projects created by other children, or several variations on the theme created by teen volunteers. During the school year, 30-50 projects may be created over a two-week period, while the summer may have 50-100 pieces created weekly. The program started in 2008 during the summer and expanded to the school year due to popularity.

Young children tell stories about their creations, share their processes and look at books relating to the theme of a project. Parents/caregivers check out books related to the project in the *Mini-Maker Art Space* or read a story to their child after the project is completed. Claudia Madrazo, an expressive arts educator notes, "Art enables children to start listening to each other, thinking and expanding their ideas – tools they will need for reading and life." She added that, "Oftentimes, teachers have very little space and time to listen to the person – not the student – but the human being. It's true for many parents, too." Art enhances language and literacy development by helping children to visualize and express ideas and emotions.

