

From the Pages of a Book: Bringing Characters to Life + Beyond the Book

By Anna Swanson.

BCLA conference session report for: *From the Pages of a Book: Bringing Characters to Life + Beyond the Book*

Saturday, April 18, 2009, 2:00 pm - 3:15 pm

Speakers: Gina Varty, Maryn Ashdown
Convener: Anna Swanson

Gina Varty: Bringing Characters to Life

"I can't pay the rent," the gaggle of damsels yell out with paper napkin bows in their hair. "You must pay the rent," counter the villains with their paper napkin moustaches. "But I can't pay the rent." And so it goes, until the hero steps in with his paper napkin bow tie to save the day. With the simplest of scripts and the most basic props imaginable (folded paper napkins from the conference hotel), Gina Varty has pulled us out of our seats and made us part of the story. Drawing on lessons from Shakespeare to Aristotle, from Mother Goose to Gilbert and Sullivan, this session provided tools and suggestions for how to use basic theatre techniques to animate any reading or library program.

As a librarian working with school age children and a long-time participant in community theatre (as an actor, director and playwright), Gina was able to show us where the two worlds meet and what libraries can learn from the theories and techniques of theatre. Her session demonstrated how quickly a reading can be transformed by a simple hat or a character voice, how to spice up the printed page, how to razzle dazzle our audiences, how to pull our audience into the show, and how to move beyond the printed page.

Maryn Ashdown: Beyond the Book

Oral storytelling, reader's theatre, songs, rhymes, puppets: These are only some of the non-book activities used by children's and school librarians everywhere, and all of them support the six basic early literacy skills promoted by ALA's Every Child Ready to Read program (Letter Knowledge, Phonemic Awareness, Narrative Skills, Vocabulary, Print Awareness, Print Motivation). Rather than teach us how to address these skills in a school or library program, this session reminded us that our children's programming *already* supports these early literacy skills, and challenged us to become more aware of these links and make them explicit – both in our own planning process, and also in our communication with others. Being able to articulate the relationship between these six skills and the activities in our children's programming is vital to our communication with parents, caregivers, administrators and funders.

Maryn also addressed the ways in which non-book activities can help to address children's various learning styles. While auditory learners make up the largest proportion of children (50%), and visual learners are a close second (40%), it is still important to make sure that we include physical learners (10%) in our programs. Regardless of preferred learning style, children are holistic learners and tend to learn better when they learn in more than one way. Everyone benefits from a diverse range of activities that speak to the "mover", the "listener" and the "looker" in all of us.

Anna Swanson is a children's librarian with the Vancouver Public Library.