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FEATURED ARTICLE



Summer Reading in Georgia Public Libraries

By Kelly E. Williams



An "Oceans of Possibility" display at a Georgia library

Summer in Georgia means three things: mosquitos, watermelon, and summer reading programs! Across the state's many public libraries, staff are gearing up to make this summer's programs boost literacy skills, connect those within the community, and provide free books and entertainment for both children and adults. One of the best resources available for summer planning is the annual posting of the Collaborative Summer Library Program (CSLP) Manual, which contains this year's theme and a wealth of information and suggestions for planners.

The goal of summer reading is to prevent the "summer slide," an effect that summer break has on children as they spend two months away from daily academics and the structure of school programs. According to Atteberry, Allison, and McEachin (2020), students lose an estimated 17–34% of the knowledge gained over the school year when they break for the summer, with literacy being a key component of that loss. To attempt to reverse this effect or provide a buffer against it, libraries use summer reading programs to provide children (and,

more recently, adults) with free books, classes, activities, and other resources.

CSLP was created in 1987 in part to halt the summer slide and help librarians craft an enjoyable summer experience for all ages by sharing ideas, information, crafts, artwork, and incentives to get people reading. CSLP chooses a different theme every year and uses that theme to create a manual with illustrations, program ideas, helpful tips, and literacy-promoting activities. The 2022 theme is "Oceans of Possibilities." The artwork, designed by Sophie Blackall, contains a joyful medley of sea creatures and children interacting with their summer books.

The CSLP manual is updated annually by contributions from volunteers from libraries across the country. Often, Georgia libraries contribute to the success of the manual by taking part in the project. Devera Chandler (Gwinnett County Public Library) and Kara Rumble (Sequoyah Regional Library System) participated in the creation of the manuals in both 2020 and 2021. Chandler and Rumble were kind enough to answer a few questions



Devera Chandler of Gwinnett County Public Library (left) and Kara Rumble of Sequoyah Regional Library System (right)

about what it is like to work on the manual and how others can get involved.

Q. Why did you join the CSLP team?

Chandler: When I first found out about the CSLP team, I wanted to be a part of the process of coming up with ideas and organizing the manual.

Rumble: I wanted to join the CSLP team because I wanted to learn more about what CSLP does to help libraries from all around get ready for summer.

Q. What is your favorite thing about summer reading?

Chandler: I love seeing everyone reading throughout the summer and even more so reading books they are interested in rather than reading assignments. Also, for many families, this is the only time we get to see them and interact with them to encourage coming back into the library.

Rumble: My favorite thing about summer reading is working with my teammates to bring

big ideas to life so we can better connect with our community! Seeing those out-of-the-box ideas come to life and community members enjoying them and, in turn, getting connected to the library. Staff are able to see the impact of their hard work. Powerful moments!

Q. What is the most memorable program you have done for summer reading?

Chandler: One year we had a silent library program where teens had to complete hilarious challenges without making a sound. In the end, I believe the staff was laughing the hardest. That program was so successful, I was asked to write an article about it for *Voice of Youth Advocates* magazine.

Rumble: Gosh, what a tough question! Last year our whole system really banded together (along with our local schools) to host a drive-through safari to kick off summer. The drive-through portion took place via school carpool lanes and attendees were invited to visit the library afterwards for a summer party featuring yard games, popsicles, etc. It was truly a team effort to implement, and we were able to connect to a lot of people who were new to the library.

Q. How do you think your library best contributes to combating the summer slide?

Chandler: Here at my branch, not only do we have system-wide incentives (logs, Beanstack) but we are continuing our Reading Buddies program. This encourages children to read out loud without being judged by their peers. It is very successful.

Rumble: Where to start! We implement monthly Beanstack challenges, but summer is obviously when it shines brightest. We also created our own badge books filled with activities for those who cannot use Beanstack for various reasons or prefer a physical option. Something that we're experimenting with this year to help maintain user engagement all summer long is weekly achievements and incentives in addition to our end-of-summer prizes. We hope that we keep our readers excited about reading through the summer months! Of course, programming plays a crucial role in us connecting caregivers to a variety of early literacy resources whether that be at a story time, a summer party at a local park, or animal program.

Q. How can others join or contribute to the CSLP project?

Chandler: I originally found out about it through a contact at the Georgia Public Library Service (GPLS).

Rumble: It's really a lot easier than people think! Don't be afraid to ask your supervisor, director, or GPLS about the possibility of getting involved! CSLP calls for committee member nominations each year, so definitely keep an eye out for that. CSLP also holds great open forums for librarians and library staff to contribute to conversations about future summer themes and summer slogans, which I think is a great way to, well, dip your toes into the CSLP oceans of (involvement) possibilities!

What works best for one library may not work for another, so a lot of ingenuity and tailoring to each community's needs is necessary to make each summer reading program a success. Websites and resources such as www.programminglibrarian.org, www.cslpreads.org, the [GPLS website](http://www.gpls.org), and the Public Library Association's [programming resources](http://www.pla.org) can help each library customize programs and tools to what will best work for



Sequoyah Regional Library staff with their "Oceans of Possibilities" display

its patrons. Apps like [Beanstack](#) are also used for tracking, logging, and other online activities. The Georgia Library Association's Programming Interest Group and Public Library Division are also great resources.

Overall, the CSLP manual and the great work that the committee does is possible because of

volunteers and the care, creativity, and competence of librarians across the country. Because of libraries, kids, teens, and adults have safe places to go where they can read, learn, and grow.

Kelly E. Williams is a supervisory librarian at Gwinnett Public Library System

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