

## Hard to Imagine: Summer Reading During COVID-19

By Linda Bartley, McCracken County Public Library; Paducah, KY

When the theme was chosen for 2020's summer reading program, "Imagine Your Story," I am sure no one on the committee imagined summer reading looking so different. COVID-19 forced us to quickly rethink our summer reading programs and how we were going to reach our patrons. Thankfully, librarians are used to being flexible and making adjustments, though maybe not to the extent that we did this year. For our library, we added lots of virtual content, as did many libraries. We partnered with our local nutritional program through the local schools, "Tornado Takeout," to promote the library's virtual summer reading. Every meal included summer reading information and a prize. This year we were also a site for the buses to stop and deliver food. Thanks to this partnership, we were able to hand out several of our summer reading prizes and information. Without this partnership, we wouldn't have reached as many families due to COVID-19 and all the restrictions.

COVID-19 did not stop us from serving our community, but it has changed how we do it. We are still doing programs, and many of the ones that were created for summer reading we will recycle for future programs and are available for our patrons to access at any time.



Matt Jaeger, our School Outreach Coordinator, created a series of videos for summer reading on how to create your own story and they can be viewed on our YouTube Channel, here is the link to the first week:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D7nabvpjZW0>.

This series of videos is brilliant and is an excellent example of families learning together. Creating your story can be done in many ways and at any age.

To encourage kids and their caregivers to get outside, Michelle Batcher, Youth Services Assistant, created Nature Kids, here is a beautiful episode about dragonflies:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ndCFKL6mEQ0>.

Then our very talented, Alaysia Hamilton, Youth Services Assistant, created Land of the Littles each week to make sure we had something for, well, our littles:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UeYC7dl\\_PHQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UeYC7dl_PHQ).

Some of our part-time staff shared their talents with our community too. A video that was viewed a lot on Facebook and is now on YouTube is a K-Pop dance tutorial by Jordan Williams, Youth Services Clerk: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O0I19BIJNfc>.

While these videos were created when the library was closed to the public, it will be easy for us to use them again for future programs.

During the months that our library was closed, we saw a considerable spike in patrons signing up for the Digital Services Only card. There was an increase in our online services usage with many patrons using these services for the first time. Now that we are open, we still see an increase in online usage, and more schools are reaching out to us to find out how to get their students signed up for cards this year. Last year we were trying to get into the schools; in fact, we have a new position in the youth services department, School Outreach Coordinator, to help the library reach as many students and their families as possible. This year we are fortunate that teachers think of the public library when they are trying to figure out resources for their students and are calling/emailing us.

We learned a lot during this time: how essential libraries are to their communities and how important the community is to us. Even though I wouldn't have imagined this story for the summer of 2020, our community has helped create the best story for the library that we can create.