

Midland Library Debuts Summer 'Black Storytime' Program

Free weekly event helps build early literacy skills children need to be ready for kindergarten

Summertime and books go together like picnics and fresh air – and at Midland library in East Portland, the youth librarians are planning a fresh approach to their usual “storytime.”

Part of Summer Reading 2012, Black Storytime is held Saturday mornings from 11:30 a.m. to noon, and features African and African American-focused materials – all with the goal of bringing more Black families into the library’s doors.

Open to all families, this special half hour features dynamic youth librarian Kirby McCurtis leading kids up to age 6 in books and stories, songs, and movement activities. “Black storytime helps build early literacy skills all chil-



Kirby McCurtis, youth librarian, is one of the most loved staff at Midland Library.

Black Storytimes are led by one of Midland Library’s most loved staff, and they will have a unique flavor that reflects the experiences, language and traditions of African and African American people

dren need to be ready for kindergarten,” says Jeremy Graybill of the Multnomah County Library. “These storytimes in particular are designed as a fun and informative way to experience African and African American culture at the library.”

Graybill says the library has spent time building similar programs for several communities served by the library, so far including storytimes in Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, and English.

“In fact, last year we offered more than 4,200 storytimes geared across our 19 library locations for the many faces, cultures, heritages, backgrounds and needs of the children of our area,” he says.

Still, he says, Black storytimes are open to all audiences. “I look forward to my own daughter attending these programs so that it may further her own appreciation and knowledge of other cultures in her neighborhood,” he said.

Surveys show that African and African American families use the library at a much lower rate than Whites and other groups.

“Through investigation and analysis, we have found that there are serious perceived barriers to a Black family coming in to the library,” Graybill says. “The library is seen as a place of benefit for others, but not to the same extent for them.”

“We believe it is our job to connect families with the richness that a lifetime of literacy can provide and that a rising

tide that lifts all boats, not one boat.”

Graybill adds that the most important aspect of Black Storytimes is that they are led by some of Midland Library’s most loved staff, and they will have a unique flavor that reflects the experiences, language and traditions of African and African American people.

“Although Black Storytimes are geared toward Black families with children from 0 to kindergarten, the library expects to see diverse families attending these storytimes,” he said.

The library is also reaching out to parents who have adopted African or African-American children, multiracial families, and “people who want their children to experience the full range of Portland’s unique cultures.”

A CENTURY

The 100th year of Summer Reading runs through Aug. 31. To commemorate the 100th year of the program, the Multnomah County Library has established a goal of getting 100,000 children, ages 0 to 18, to participate.

Given that more than 81,000 kids have already signed up, thanks to help from local schools, and that last year’s program achieved 98,000 participants, this goal is well within reach.

Here’s how Summer Reading works: Kids sign up for the program and receive a game board customized for their age group. To progress on the game board, and win prizes along the way, kids participate in such activities as reading, being read to, listening to audio books, reading aloud to others, writing a book review, drawing a picture about a book, and attending events at their neighborhood library.

Everyone who signs up for Summer Reading is eligible for one free ticket each to a Portland Timbers and a Trail Blazers game (with the purchase of an adult ticket). Game board finishers receive a commemorative Summer Reading T-shirt, and are entered into a grand prize stay for a family of four at Great Wolf Lodge.

Find out more at your local library or www.multcolib.org.

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