

I had the pleasure of viewing the virtual program “ Toddler Storytime with Katie”, presented by Katie, one of the children’s librarians at the Aloha Public library. The recording was just over nine minutes long and identifies as being geared toward ages 18-36 months old. Katie shared with me that she starts each storytime program with the same welcoming song - “Hello Bubbles”. She explained that this public library has a long-time following, and “Hello Bubbles” is a long-standing tradition that the community loves. It gets the participants’ attention, soothes any nerves that newer participants may be feeling, and lets everyone know that the show is about to begin! Another reason she upholds this tradition is because repetition is so important for establishing routines at this age. After her welcoming song, she invites everyone to join in for a second opening-style song - “It’s So Good to See You”, which she recites three times, switching up the actions each time. If there are any leftover wiggles that her patrons need to get out before listening to her upcoming story choice, this is definitely the time.

Next, Katie introduces the storybook “Everything is Momma”, written by Jimmy Fallon. She includes a permission statement, which admittedly was something I had not seen before. This is something I would like to look more into for the sake of my future storytimes, to ensure that I am following necessary protocols. Though the story has but only two words and relies heavily on pictures to communicate ideas, Katie includes her own narration to further explain the storyline. She also engages participants and makes the story more interactive by asking them questions about the story as she turns the pages and invites them to predict the pattern (repeating mama). I took to Follette Titlewave to read reviews on this book since I was not familiar with it, and I do think I found some discrepancies between what I saw from the book as Katie read it, and what Titlewave described. The first difference is that this book seemed appropriately selected for the 18-36 month age range Katie was reading it to based on the small number of

words per page, bold text, and simplified color palette. However, Titlewave details this book as being geared toward grades K-3rd, which would put it closer to 5-8 year olds. The second difference I saw was that Titlewave describes this book as one that supports social and emotional learning by teaching relationship skills. Again, this is not what I gathered after viewing the story. There is a strong emphasis on word recognition and repetition, and I do believe this book is more geared toward the toddler range, rather than 5-8 year olds that are speaking and practicing writing full sentences.

To remind parents that this program is designed to teach the five early literacy skills that support young patrons as they learn to read and write, and to help her participants remember what those five skills are, she next encourages everyone to sing along with her as she sings “Talk, Sing, Read, Write, Play!”. Then, to further support her patrons and their early literacy journey, Katie includes a tip of the week that reflects at least one of the five early literacy skills. This week she encouraged participants to practice their letters. As an offered option, Katie suggests doing this at home by writing out your child’s name in dashes and having the child trace each letter to spell their own name. She shares that this practice helps children connect a word they’re familiar with (their name) with print on paper. The more they practice by association, the stronger their connection to individual letters will become over time. I love that she offers a tip for children and their guardians to practice after they leave the storytime, and I think this optional activity could have been strengthened by the inclusion of a visual example so adults and children could clearly understand the activity and the steps involved. It could have also been added to the storytime itself, had they given a heads up to participants - something like “Please have a writing utensil and piece of paper handy - we’re going to practice tracing our names at the end of storytime today!”.

Katie's second-to-last activity was chosen specifically to practice hand strength and dexterity that will be necessary for holding a pencil and writing later on in a child's development. Katie begins to sing "Baby Shark" (a huge hit, she adds), accompanied by hand motions that evolve as the song progresses.

Storytime comes to an end with the introduction of the closing song "The Less We Get Together" - a variation of the classic "The More We Get Together". In her version, the lyrics address the current climate by recognizing that we must socially distance ourselves for the sake of staying healthy and not spreading germs.

Overall, I believe that the program met the goals that Katie set out to achieve. Her focus centered around early literacy skills and covered the majority of the five literacy skills throughout the storytime. Participants were encouraged to talk throughout the reading of the book by way of answering questions about the story. Singing was a strong staple of this storytime, as it is for all of the storytime programmings. Reading was also included, as Katie took to reading the story aloud to the group. I do think since the program was virtual, there was a missed opportunity here to zoom in on the book itself so children could see the words on the page better, and continue their letter recognition skills. Writing was encouraged by sharing the literacy tip of the week and recommending that the children practice tracing their own names. The only aspect that wasn't formally touched on was the fifth skill - play. However, you could easily argue that this entire storytime program was an opportunity to engage in structured play. Another option for including this skill is one that I see at the end of the majority of storytime programs - a socializing time where children can visit with their peers and play in a less structured way. Of course, this proves to be more difficult when everyone is joining virtually!

I enjoyed the opportunity to view this storytime and gain insight from Katie. One of my biggest takeaways that I'll be sure to include in my own storytimes is how Katie celebrates her community's traditions. Though she changes up certain aspects of the storytimes, "Hello Bubbles" is here to stay, and her participants have come to expect it! I want my future storytime participants to recognize that during the program, I am keenly aware of their reactions to different parts of the program, and I am more than happy to cater the early literacy activities to their interests.