Our Sensory-enhanced storytime is a traditional storytime with sensory enhancements, such as fidgets for the children to hold, sensory balls, dual presentations of a story where we read from the storybook while the volunteer presents the flannel version, scent jars to pass around, and additional opportunities to move. Our storytime is designed to be at a toddler or preschool level of development, while being for all ages of youth on the autism spectrum, differently-abled, and typically developing.

**The 5 steps to develop and begin our sensory-enhanced storytime**

1. **Formed a District Task Force**
   We began developing our storytime with a District Task Force including Associate Directors, Branch Manager, Youth Department Heads, Community Relations, Training, Volunteer Dept. Head, Branch Volunteer Coordinator, & Youth Librarians. Task force met for 10 months with input from:
   - Tricia Twaragowski’s ALSC blog, *Programming for Children with Special Needs* at [http://tinyurl.com/76hk5pw](http://tinyurl.com/76hk5pw)
   - Our local public school district

2. **Developed our resources**
   -- Storytime Plans: We adapted traditional plans to include sensory elements of double visuals (simultaneous story and flannel), scents, textures, sounds, movements, and interactive elements such as adapted books and storybook images on craft sticks.
   -- The space: We changed it according to the Autism Society’s recommendations-
     - No push pins, pencils, paper clips, etc. on floor or any surfaces
     - No fluorescent light banks on, can lights only plus natural light
     - No ceiling fans running
     - Remove or block stacked chairs and other climbing hazards
   -- Visual Schedule: Friendly caterpillar face and clip-art images for activities-
     - Read a Book, Sing a Song, Fingerplay, Flannelboard story, Bubbles, Parachute, etc. You can search “Visual Schedule” and find many ideas and resources.
   -- Songs repeated at sensory storytime:
     - **Hello Song**
       Hi, hello, and how are you,
       How are you, how are you?
       Hi, hello, and how are you,
       How are you today?

     **Choo Choo Name Song**
     Choo Choo, Choo Choo,
     Choo Choo, Choo Choo,
     Up the railroad track,

     Choo Choo, Choo Choo,
     Choo Choo, Choo Choo,
     Then we come right back,
First we go ______’s house,
Then we go ______’s house,
Then we go ______’s house,....
Then we come right back.

**Sticky Bubble Gum Song, multiple versions on YouTube**

**Scarf Song.** “Shake Your Scarves” by Johnette Downing, *The Second Line* MCD

**Bubble Song** from *Mailbox Magazine* (tune- Twinkle Twinkle Little Star)
Bubbles floating all around,
Bubbles fat and bubbles round,
Bubbles on your nose and toes,
Blow a bubble, up it goes.
Bubbles floating all around,
Bubbles floating to the ground.

**Parachute Song,** “Shaky, Shaky” by The Wiggles, *Yummy Yummy* MCD

**Goodbye Song**
Goodbye, goodbye, we’ll see you soon, see you soon, see you soon,
Goodbye, goodbye, we’ll see you soon, on another day.

3. **Introduced storytime to staff**
We introduced staff to the new storytime with the presentation of the Autism Society’s Autism 101 informational slideshow, and a demonstration of a sensory storytime, at District-wide Staff Day. We had staff thank us for increasing their confidence when serving patrons with special needs. The Autism 101 presentation was very helpful to us, because it prepared us for our interactions with the children and young adults. If we had not known these signs of autism, we may have misunderstood our participants’ actions and felt that storytime was of little value to them.

4. **Recruited & trained volunteers**
Our Branch Volunteer Coordinator recruited the volunteers and designed their training. The training session included *Autism 101* from the ASC and a demonstration of the volunteers’ roles in a sample storytime. We requested a minimum 6-month time commitment from each volunteer.

5. **Introduced storytime with Pilot program**
We began offering our sensory storytime with a Pilot Program to help us determine the best days and times, our likely audience, understand the effectiveness of each part of the storytime, adjust it based on our experiences and parent recommendations, and develop additional sensory-rich activities. The Pilot ran for 3 months on differing days of the week each month. We welcomed siblings, extended family, and medical therapists. We required an adult to be with participants, but not a one-to-one ratio. During the Pilot we posted our Social Story on our sensory storytime web page. We based our Social Story ([http://DouglasCountyLibraries.org/storytime/sensorystorytime](http://DouglasCountyLibraries.org/storytime/sensorystorytime)) on the example we received from the Inclusion Collaborative of the Santa Clara County Office of Education, and we referred all registrants to it in the pre-survey we sent to them. We offered a resource table with information on library programs, local special needs resources, and community events. During the Pilot program, we
decided to cap the storytime attendance at 15, not including parents/caregivers or siblings, and to limit the storytime length to between 20 and 30 minutes.

**Universal Design for Learning**

Sensory storytime is effective, in part, because it is based on the concept of “Universal Design for Learning. The precepts [of this concept] are simple: multiple means of representation, engagement, expression, and assessment...By providing children with more than one way to interact with the material, we allow more children to become engaged and provide them with a comfortable point of access...Multiple means of engagement means using their strengths and interests to make a connection between them and the material.” p. 66


**Additional Resources**


**How to Talk to an Autistic Kid.** Daniel Stefanski. 2011.


Sensory storytime videos at: [http://tinyurl.com/k6js4m9](http://tinyurl.com/k6js4m9)  [http://tinyurl.com/l7993fc](http://tinyurl.com/l7993fc)

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