



Photo by Daphne Walker Nabors



Plan a productive summer for your kids without breaking your budget

When it comes to keeping kids busy with positive pursuits during the summer, it is enough to make parents crazy. How do you keep them engaged? What activities will they enjoy that don't come with expensive fees? What resources are available locally?

The good news is there are excellent programs available for your kids and the only price of admission is a library card. Take children's book author and illustrator Chuck Gale's word on it. He has been bringing summer adventures to libraries across Mississippi since the late 1990s.

Since the 1890s, summer reading programs sponsored by local public libraries have been encouraging children to use the library and develop a life-long love of reading.



Summer Adventures in the LIBRARY

by Chuck Gale

Summer vacation is almost here. For parents of school-aged children, there is always the question of how can a parent keep their kids sharp during the summer and still let them have some fun.

Your local library is a good way to meet those challenges for your kids. Most libraries have summer reading programs that kids can attend to learn all sorts of things.

The public library is a subject that is near and dear to my heart. When I walk into a library, I don't see shelves of books, magazines and DVDs. No, I see the portal to adventure through a time machine that is a book. For all these books have stories about people and their experiences about life in places where I hope to go, but would never be able to cover them all in my lifetime. This is because some of these places only exist in history. Still, the time I spend with a book is compact and tranquil, an escape from the present.

I remember going to the library during my childhood summers. Filling out the forms for how many books I had read that week. Goals were set and met... or not met. But I can't remember a time when there was a program given - a program that drew kids to the library.

That's why I present programs at the library. The state of Mississippi has one of the highest illiteracy rates in the country. Many programs and individuals have tried to address this problem, but somehow it always gets bogged down in funding and politics. It's ironic that a state, known for its writers and entertainers, has the highest illiteracy rate.

In my estimation, the solution to this problem, like the solution to many problems, begins in the home. Parents can encourage reading in the home by letting their children see them reading a newspaper, magazine, or book. It's a great bonding experience for families to go to the library together.



Photo by Jackson-George Library System



And, don't worry about e-books taking over the reading world. When television came along, the movie industry saw it as competition for the entertainment dollar. So, the studios made going to the movies an event, a destination and an enhanced experience. Today, movies are more popular than ever. E-books will have their place in publishing, but there will always be the classic printed word.

I first started visiting libraries in the late 1990s. Every library in the country has a summer reading program to invite school aged kids in to continue their reading. This is so they won't lose their learning/student edge over the summer.

As an author/illustrator of children's books, I find presenting these programs each summer keeps me connected with my readers. It lets me know what's going on in their lives and what is popular these days.

After a while one becomes accustomed to being in front of kids more than being in front of adults, especially since in my mind, I'm an eight-year old boy in an old man's body, with a Peter Pan complex. I've just never grown up, so it suits me pretty well.

I've visited the largest of libraries in Mississippi cities and towns to the smallest railroad boxcar size branch libraries in rural Mississippi. It's always the same. Parents and grandparents bring those kids out to see what's going on. You can see it in the kids' eyes. "Show us something new and different!" they always say. If you've ever been in front of a bunch of kids, you know that they are brutally honest. They'll yawn. They'll tap the shoulder of their buddy next to them starting a small scuffle. These are kids. You'll lose them very quickly if your program isn't interesting. Just talking to them doesn't work. You have to show them some-

thing. Today's kids are very visual, growing up with video games, the Internet and all sorts for kids programming on television.

These are not adults trying to pay attention in a corporate workshop. This is the library during summer vacation to them! In a typical library presentation, the kids have just rolled out of bed and grabbed a quick breakfast before Mom drove them to the library. So I have to be on my best game to make sure they receive the best program I can give to them.

For young people, summer vacation is sacred. When flowers begin to bud in the spring, they know that summer vacation and freedom is not too far away. To be able to present my programs to them and hold their attention, is a challenge and an honor. To have them ask questions is even better. I always try to keep the presentations light and fun and fast paced.

Librarians touch the future of their young library patrons because they are the gatekeepers to knowledge. Their job is to put the right book into the hands of a student to help them become lifelong readers. And lifelong readers will become better educated and informed citizens.

In a way, that's my mission, too. To provide entertaining stories, well crafted illustrations and interesting characters for young readers to enjoy, remember and cherish.



Children's book author/illustrator Chuck Gale presents Common Core Curriculum compliant arts integration programs to schools and libraries all over the country. Visit his website: www.chuckgale.com for more information.