

Middle School Family Literacy Initiative Partner Spotlight

Susan Brady is a middle school reading specialist at Heritage Middle School and has hosted several family literacy events including a recent Hawaiian themed event through RIF's MSFLI. In this Q&A, Susan shares how she has been able to create and sustain successful family literacy events.

Q: A successful family literacy event involves active participation from families. How have you ensured your attendance increased each year?

A: We sent out bright invitations and posted them around the school in three different languages. We also put the flyer on the school website and Class Dojo. I had teachers “talk it up” in class, and some offered extra credit for attending the event. I offered a secret prize to the first 30 students that came (a stress pineapple – BIG hit!). We tried to get the older students to encourage the younger students: you know how younger students think that the 8th graders are just the BEST! When students arrived, they guessed how many candy sharks and mermaid tails were in jars. The closest guesses got to keep the candy! We also make a big deal about dressing up, making memories with our backdrops, and setting up multiple classrooms throughout the school to host activities for students to do with their families. [Here are some photographs](#) from the night of the event!

Q: Research demonstrates that food is an important component for family events. How did you all secure food for your event?

A: My committee and I discussed a variety of food options. This year we went with 1) Hawaiian rolls plain and with spinach dip, not pork, to consider the religious beliefs of some families, 2) fish crackers and popcorn in bags decorated with hibiscus flowers, 3) tropical fruit cups, and 4) water bottles. We added Hawaiian stickers on the bottles for a little flair! Last year we had a movie/Hollywood theme and had boxed theater candy and popcorn. When students arrived, they guessed how many starburst candies were in jars. We had our cafeteria staffers fix all of the food, but we also wanted to get community involvement, so we got an ice cream cart to sell tropical popsicles (they are right across the street from our school!).

Q: We learn best through collaboration. Any other information/advice you may want to share for other sites to host successful family literacy nights?

A: Get a committee together and start planning EARLY! We had our first meetings during the first week of September to plan for November 4th. EVERYONE helped! People researched their own ideas and we met to trim and expand. When activities were decided, each teacher found materials on Amazon and sent me their order. I also suggest inviting local libraries. One made it, but one could not. In the past, we have had the principal from the local high school come and read books. One year we also did Men and Books; Dads, brothers, uncles, grandpas (etc.) came with students and we had different careers and ages represented throughout the event to engage students with reading. The major came too! We all wore fake mustaches. One year, we dressed up in choir robes and sang R-E-A-D-I-N-G to the tune of R-E-S-P-E-C-T. That was a hoot! We are already thinking about next year!



Sample Motivational Activity for Your Family Literacy Night

Family Poem Collage

Age Group: Grades 4-8

Materials Needed: Magazines, newspapers, scissors, glue sticks

Set Up Materials: Arrange the materials on tables in a designated area. Make sure there's enough space for families to work comfortably. Provide clear instructions on where to find the magazines, newspapers, scissors, and glue sticks.

Introduce the Activity: Gather families together and explain the "Poem Collage" challenge. Explain that they will be working as a family to create a collage using words and images to express their thoughts and feelings. Emphasize how much time they will have to create a collage using words and images cut from the provided materials. Encourage creativity and meaningful arrangement of the words and images.

Demonstrate Collage Making: Provide a brief demonstration on how to create a collage using the materials. Show examples of different ways to arrange the words and images to convey a message or theme. Encourage families to experiment with different layouts and designs.

Start the Timer: Set a timer for X amount of minutes to help families stay focused and make the most of their time. Let families know when the timer starts and remind them of how much time they have left at regular intervals.

Provide Support: Circulate among the families to offer assistance and support as needed. Encourage families to work together and collaborate on their collages.

Wrap Up: When the timer goes off, invite families to finish up their collages. Invite them to share their creations with each other and explain the meaning behind their collage.

Reflection: Ask children to write a short paragraph reflecting on their creative process and the meaning behind their collage. Consider questions such as: What inspired their choice of words and images? How did they arrange the elements to convey a message or theme? What emotions or ideas do they hope their collage communicates to others?