

Hosting Outdoor Story Time in All Kinds of Weather



We all love our friendly, chatty group of kids and adults who attend our story times! Unfortunately, as Covid 19 rates rise this winter, sharing the air in our libraries' childrens' rooms is not a healthy option. So how *do* we continue to safely gather to support our library families?

After several months of Zoom story time this spring and summer, the Cook Memorial Library in Tamworth, New Hampshire decided it was time to bring story time back to the library. Prior to the pandemic, the library had hosted one of their story times each month in the library's backyard. To increase safety and access this fall, story time transitioned to being 100% outside. Families bring their own blankets and spread out from one another. Librarians carefully choose books with large, bright pictures, act out some of their stories and have learned to project their voices even more!

After stories, songs and related movement, a play scenario is introduced. When children play in nature it adds depth to the learning already taking place. The open space lends itself to expanded gross motor movement, which equals warmer bodies. The limitless natural supplies

(think sticks, dirt, leaves) inspire cooperation and creativity. Enticing open-ended play invitations, introduce engaging play challenges.

Helpful hints for creating your own safe outdoor story time:

- Ask each family to bring its own blanket and leave 6 feet between family groups.
- Choose books with large, clear, bright pictures or use a felt board, puppets or acting to share stories with your well-spaced group.
- When engaged in group play, require masks for everyone two years and older.
- Design play scenarios that include some distance between children.

A few of Cook Memorial Library's favorite outdoor story time themes, books and accompanying play scenarios:

- Story time theme - **Feasts** (can be done at Thanksgiving, Halloween, or as a Spring celebration)
- Books - Stone Soup by Brown, Room on a Broom by Donaldson, Thank You, Omu by Mora
- Play Scenario - Create a big stew in a few buckets using water, sticks, leaves, etc.. Play can lead to all kinds of outdoor "cooking".

- Story time theme - **Create a Town**
- Books - Mattland by Hutchins, Snow by Eastman, The Snowy Day by Keats, Katy and the Big Snow by Burton
- Play Scenario - Create a town out of snow and other materials. No snow? Modify using dirt and found objects.

- Story time theme - **Moving our bodies** (also can be done with a Halloween or an Owl theme)
- Books - Bears in the Night by Berenstain
- Play Scenario - Act out the obstacle course the bears go through in the story, and/or create your own courses for one another.

- Story time theme - **Animal Homes**
- Books - Over and Under the Snow by Messner, Keep Looking by Selsam, One Winter's Day by Butler
- Play Scenario - Create homes for animals using snow and a few plastic animal friends. Play can transition into tunnel digging, exploring snowy footprints, snow forts and sliding.

