



The Beacon Society

JAN STAUBER GRANT PROGRAM

To Support Programs Introducing Young People to Sherlock Holmes

<http://beaconsociety.com/JanStauberGrant.html>



Report on the Sherlock Holmes Birthday Celebration – Newburgh Free Library

Description:

I would consider the Sherlock Holmes Birthday Party to be a success. Despite the temperature with wind chill being approximately -10° F, we had 33 participants who came to one or more aspects/sessions of the celebration.

Reading session, ages 3-5: The celebration began with storytime for the youngest age group listening to the book “Mitzi Tulane, Pre-school Detective: What’s That Smell?” One of the children, a four-year-old, listened as I paused in the story and recounted the “clues” so far: “Mommy is baking something sweet, Daddy is shaving and putting on a fancy shirt, and friends keep coming over. What do you think is happening?” The little boy’s eyes lit up and he called out, “It’s a party happening!” It was good to see that “ah-ha” moment of deduction, however small. Afterwards, we read the board book “Hound of the Baskervilles Sounds Primer.” The boys enjoyed making the sounds in the book and I could pause and explain the pictures. (E.g. “This is Sherlock Holmes and his friend, Dr. Watson. Mr. Holmes is a detective. Do you know what a detective is?” etc.) The children seemed very happy to get the books and magnifying glasses after the reading.

Reading session, ages 6-9: This session began with a complete reading of “Nate the Great: The Case of the Fleeing Fang.” I distributed the “clue notebooks” and writing implements so the participants could “solve along.” I chose this particular Nate the Great adventure because it contains tips on being a detective such as “You have to notice people, places, and things” and “You have to figure out what is important. And what isn’t.” I paused periodically to emphasize these points and to ask questions. This reading took longer than anticipated so that I didn’t have time to read the whole story of “The Speckled Band” as intended. Instead I introduced the story and then discussed Sherlock Holmes as a detective who uses deduction to solve cases before giving the children their copies of “Mysteries of Sherlock Holmes” so they could read the mystery afterwards.

The birthday cake and song: After the second reading session came the time to sing “Happy Birthday” to Sherlock Holmes and have some of the cake. While adults and children ate we could talk about when Holmes was born and how long ago that was and I could answer their other questions about the characters/canon. (I even had a few questions from fellow staff-members, including one inquiry as to whether the story “The Red Headed League” involved ghosts!) Participants were also

encouraged to head over to the e-learning computer lab where the website of the Junior Sherlockian Society and related links were being featured.

Reading session, ages 10 and up: There were three participants who were between 11 and 16. They had all come together and had been at the program since it began at 1PM. When I invited them in for the reading session of the original Speckled Band at 2:30, however, they said they were being picked up just then and had to leave. I did at least have the chance to talk with this specific group about the Great Detective earlier on in the afternoon, sharing my first encounter with the stories and some interesting facts about the canon. I made sure they all had their copies of the selected stories and they asked to take a picture with me in costume before they left.

The hat making station – At this station, participants could make a brown construction paper deerstalker. This was not only a fun craft for the children, but it gave our library assistant (who was “manning” that station) the time to engage in conversation with the children and their parents about problem solving skills (reading directions, etc.)

The fingerprint station – Paper and washable stamp pads were provided for the children to take their own fingerprints. They could make fingerprint art, but they also could use their new magnifying glasses to examine the patterns they could see in the prints. (Were there whirls, swirls, loops, or something else? How were the prints different from their friend’s prints?) Nearby was the picture book, “Officer Panda, Fingerprint Detective,” about a panda policeman who solves the mystery of who got fingerprints on the book.

The game station – One table was set up as the game station. The board games “Sherlock Deluxe” and “Clue Jr., Case of the Missing Cake” were set out for participants to play as time allowed. There was also a memory game wherein approximately 20 items (ex. a plastic donut, a spoon, a heart ornament, a sand dollar, etc.) were placed on a tray under a cover. When the cover was taken off, players had 30 seconds during which to memorize as many objects as they could. When the cover was replaced, they would write down as many objects as they remembered.

The scavenger hunt – This was a very popular activity with codes, including the “Dancing Men” code. The first code (a “window” code) led children to the chapter book area. There they found a slip of paper with part of a short mystery story on it and a second code. After reading the story section and decrypting the “Dancing Men” code (with a key, as the children were very young) the hunters were led to the next location. After decrypting three more different codes (in the junior non-fiction section, the kid magazines, and the storybook kits) the children could put the parts of the mystery story together and try to solve it. (It was the one page “Mystery of the Broken-into Beach Shop.”) A final code led participants to a sheet of paper with the mystery solution so they could check their answer.

Goals:

I believe that several goals were achieved by this program. Several children who before knew little about Sherlock Holmes were introduced to the basics of his story and were intrigued enough to ask questions (“How old is Sherlock Holmes?” “Is he still alive?” “Where is England?” “Who is Mrs. Hudson?” “Why does he wear that hat?” etc.). The graphic novel versions of “The Speckled Band” and “The Red-Headed League” were checked out, along with some picture books that introduce young children to the idea of observation, such as “Who Done It?”

Impact:

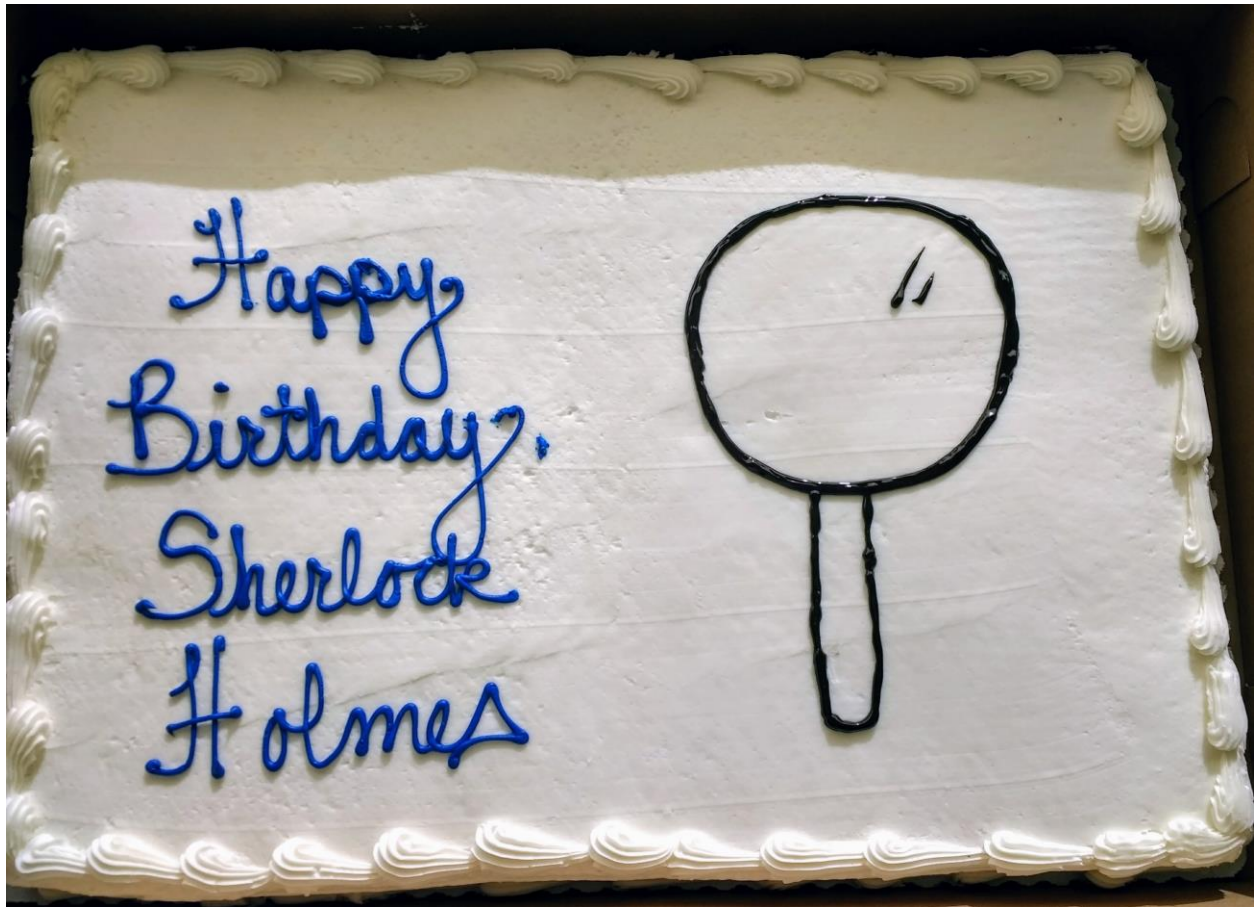
Impact...on the grantee – I am very thankful to have been able to conduct this program. As a Holmes enthusiast myself, I am always glad to inspire young readers to become one as well. I am planning on doing another, similar, program next year. There are just a few things that I would have done differently: I would have been a bit more formal with the Q and A challenge and quiz that I made, possibly running them together as a group event. (As is was, some participants took quizzes home to complete, but I don’t know their results.) Also, looking back, I would definitely have read “The Speckled Band” to the middle age group first so that they could hear one entire story of Sherlock Holmes and then just used the Nate the Great detective tips to supplement as time permitted.

Impact...on the library – One of the main impacts this program had on the library was to bring in adults and children together. When the children participated in activities, the adults also gained a better understanding of the library and what it offers. Even library regulars often don’t know all the library services and are still surprised to learn that the library has, say, magazines for children or picture books with “read-along” CDs in the kit section to support emerging readers. One mother told me she hadn’t known that there was such a thing as a “mystery picture book.”

The program also ties in with state-wide library goals; the goals aim to give caregivers examples of how to “live literacy.” It’s easy to say to adults “make learning fun for your children and they will absorb it” but programs like the Sherlock Holmes Birthday Celebration show it really is doable.

Impact...on the participants - Caregivers who may not have even thought of introducing their very young children to the idea of mysteries, let alone introducing them to Sherlock Holmes, were shown that it could be a fun endeavor that need not go over children’s heads. I believe that this program demonstrated that it is never too early to start learning a skill (like observation) or reading in a genre (mystery). Introducing concepts and characters early (by, say, looking at a “Hamster Holmes” easy reader or examining fingerprints) creates a foundation can be built upon as children become more sophisticated readers. The nine-year-olds who so eagerly took up the Holmes graphic novels will hopefully be the same girls who pick up Doyle’s original works before too long.

It was good to get positive feedback from a number of the families. One mother even directly told us how memorable an event this would be for her two girls. At one point a grandmother and grandson were doing a Sherlockian word search together. The little boy was asking questions about the words they were finding and the grandmother was answering them enthusiastically, personally passing on her enjoyment of the stories. And that, I think, is the best result of all.





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