

## **A-Team Kids are Coming to the Library**

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**Abstract:** *When school librarians learn that Special Needs classes are coming for weekly library classes, they often feel uncertain in their abilities to create engaging lessons. This article describes a school librarian's development of an effective library program for four Special Education classes over the span of ten years. Professional books, conversations with Special Education teachers and anecdotal notes that validate teaching strategies helped to frame a Year long Plan of engaging lessons and activities which have been shared at professional librarian conferences. School librarians can use the Tips and Tricks to create a curriculum that makes Special Needs children love their libraries too!*

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### ***Introduction***

When school librarians have heard the words “The A-Team students (or Special Needs) will be coming to the library every week”, what is likely to be their initial reaction? Over the past ten years, I have heard sentiments from fellow school librarians that have ranged from limited knowledge about different disabilities and unsure how to plan for lessons for them. As I created the Google slide show presentation for the SCASL/IASL Conference, I remembered the honest self-reflection of my knowledge of Special Needs students and how I provided instruction to all four Special Need classes for the past ten years.

### ***Foundation and Understanding of Special Needs Students***

I shared with the session's participants that I began planning with limited knowledge and instructional experiences in 2011. To increase my knowledge, I searched for American Library Association (ALA) articles and any school librarian related websites that focused on lesson plans and activities for Special Needs students. I found only one blog (which is now defunct) and **one** School Library Journal article. In addition, I learned more about Autism

Spectrum Disorder (ASD) by reading some of the professional books in the school's library for teaching our students. Between 2011-2017, I had developed a year-long plan of lessons and activities that enabled our students to learn about different genres of literature and robotics.

### ***Sharing Best Practices and Ideas with Other Librarians***

The opportunity to share my lesson plans and activities with other librarians came when I was awarded my state's 2017 School Librarian of the Year award. Each award recipient is required to share a topic at the 2018 state conference. This was the inspiration for creating and sharing a presentation of the knowledge that I had gained from working with my Special Needs students.

### ***2022 SCASL/IASL Conference Presentation***

The current presentation for the 2022 SCASL/IASL Conference has retained some features from the original 2018 presentation. The learning goals for the sessions' participants are: 1) Being able to describe Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD); 2) Behaviors associated with ASD; 3) Explaining 2 or more activities to do with Special Needs students. By retaining the inclusion of medical information for background knowledge, the librarians teach with a better understanding of their students and their learning styles. The session's participants shared a common base of knowledge about assistive technology and social behaviors often displayed by students who have disabilities. They learned that the Sensory Processing Disorder may explain distractive behaviors during a story and that Hyperlexia may affect their ability to answer a comprehension question related to the plot or directions given for a robotics lesson. (Anderson, 2021).

### ***Getting Started with Explanations and Demonstrations***

New specific details were added to the presentation including Tips and Tricks; story and related activities; a glossary and a list of resources. The presentation begins with pictures showing the students who attend my school and their different disabilities. The next slides highlights tips and tricks that advise librarians for starting how to make a "learning plan". Here is the summary of the Tips and Tricks:

**Tip #1:** Meeting with the Special Education teachers and assistants provides specific learning information about their students such as Individual Education Plan/504 Plans, Ages, behaviors and skills, etc.

**Tip #2:** Create a Learning Environment that includes a Visual Agenda, defined learning space and a short list of behavioral management rules. The SPED team stated that STRUCTURED library visit was vital.

**Tip #3:** A chart outlining the learning styles and common behaviors displayed for the three groups: Younger/Lower Functioning (5-7 years old); Mixed class (7 years old and up); and, Older/Higher Functioning (Ages 8-11 years old) was explained for planning meaningful lessons. Planning for lessons should consider the grouping's learning styles, topics they are learning in their Special Education or Mainstream class as well as the inclusion of technology or art.

**Tip #4: Start with a Variety of Learning Activities.** The learning activities were broken down into four major groups: (A) Singalongs with hand gestures; (B) Movement activities; (C) E-books with songs/music; (D) videos with animals or true information. Examples of each grouping along with website links were provided on the slides. Images of suggested books and videos with kinesthetic activities such as hand gestures, body movement or songs were featured because the SPED classrooms use them daily.

- Photos of students as they were completing the art projects were shown. Sensory art projects allow students to use art supplies such as yarn, cotton balls, felt, stickers, etc while honing social skills such as sharing with others. Materials of the various art activities and the completed examples (Friendshape person, a felt pizza and cotton ball cloud picture) were passed around so that participants could take photos, touch and ask additional questions related to the preparation and completion of the activities by the students.
- More story and activity ideas were included based on the communication and age level of the students. After watching the Mo Willems' slop cooking video, a demonstration of the "I Really Like Slop Pot Sensory Activity" allowed three of the participants to select items from the big pot and guess the item using their sense of touch. This activity was described as a positive confidence building/sensory activity. The pot was filled with yarn and some fun items for them to feel, smell or hear during this guessing game. I explained that every student has a chance to pull out the item, feel it and guess what the item is so that their classmates can congratulate them for their guess.

- A simulation of a Dash robot using a xylophone attachment had limited success. The purpose was to highlight the benefits of music therapy and the robot's enhancement of Eye-Hand Coordination, Motor Skills, Social Cues and Skills, Focus and Attention as well as Creative Expression.
- The session's participants attested that they noticed older students who can follow instructions, play games and could participate in more difficult learning experiences are coming to learn with General Education classes during library visits. I advised them to learn if the student needs accommodations and differentiations for their learning styles. For example, a card catalog lesson needs less differentiation than a History research project. Whereas, some students may need the Special Needs Aides to repeat step-by-step instructions during technology based lessons such as Google Earth and online coding websites.
- The Oregon trail diary book was passed around as an example of a differentiated history research project for older students. A request was made to view the *Toon Books* website to see how the words are highlighted as a student reads the books. Teen story activities were part of the presentation but participants did not teach teen students.

**Tip #5: Organize Your Resources.** Everyone was encouraged to use their favorite organization resources. The examples shown included Google Slides (for lessons), Symboloo tiles, Youtube Channel for frequently used videos; Choice Boards and/or Google Sites. Although new organization ideas appear each school year, it is best to utilize resources that are easy to facilitate, age appropriate and kid friendly.

Lastly, the structure of the check out time includes having the library cards available, calling out each student's name aloud and letting them choose a book that interests them. A photo with a suggested layout of books was shown.

### ***Wrapping it all up***

The session met its learning goals in which the participants were given the opportunity to understand more about how to begin planning for teaching students with Special Needs in the library. The session featured information, literature as well as lessons and learning activities. Most people are interested in purchasing the *Library Programming for Children and Teens* book to deepen their knowledge of ASD, Sensory Processing Disorder and Hyperlexia and

how each would play a role in the students' learning during a library lesson. The book offered examples of activities that participants found interesting to do with their students. Luckily, over the past ten years, more resources have been published for librarians to learn about Special Needs students and Autism.

My best advice was to begin planning following a conversation with the Special Education teachers and their aides because their knowledge was both powerful and life changing. It is important to be prepared to take notes to the question: "What do you, as a Special Education Team, think that a school librarian should know when teaching students with disabilities?" Most of their advice are the tips included in my current presentation slides.

The Exit slip answers revealed that the participants' level of knowledge had either changed significantly or wanted more information. In addition, the most useful tips that they heard included the varied hands-on activities, class management and SPED team meeting. The activities that they plan to do in their school library were: the Pot of Slop activity, the felt pizza activity and other hands-on sensory activities. All of the participants were given a "Year at a Glance" that shows 35 themed weeks of instruction for both the Younger/Nonverbal and Older/Verbal/Higher Functioning students.

***"Year at A Glance"***

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>For younger ages, nonverbal/low functioning:</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>For older ages, verbal/higher functioning:</b></p>
<p>Week 1 - Orientation (<i>Curious George goes to the Library</i> video and coloring page)</p> <p>Week 2 - Pirates (<i>How I became a Pirate</i> video)</p> <p>Week 3 - M. Mayer (<i>Just Me and My Dad</i> video)</p> <p>Week 4-Mo Willems' <i>I Really Like Slop</i> Book, video &amp; Pot of Slop sensory activity</p> <p>Week 5 - "<i>Ten Apples on Top</i>" (Make a Apple Tree with Hand)</p> <p>Week 6 - Berenstain Bears' Prize Pumpkin video and Pumpkin coloring sheet</p> <p>Week 7 - Clifford's First Autumn book/video &amp; Letter Match online game or Smartboard games</p>	<p>Week 1 - Orientation (<i>Curious George goes to the Library</i> video and coloring page)</p> <p>Week 2 - Pirates (<i>How I became a Pirate</i> video)</p> <p>Week 3 - M. Mayer (<i>Just Me and My Dad</i> video)</p> <p>Week 4- Mo Willems' <i>I Really Like Slop</i> Book and video and Pot of Slop activity *Sensory activity</p> <p>Week 5 - Wordless Books "<i>Flying Books of Morris Lessmore</i>" video</p> <p>Week 6 - Arthur on PBSKids (Arthur's New Puppy) and Games</p> <p>Week 7 - <i>Hot Rod Hamster</i> book and a Monster Truck show video</p>

Week 8 - Superhero ABC video and hero shields

Week 9- More Mo with Knuffle Bunny and *Pigeon Wants a Puppy* (Dog coloring page)

Week 10-Bear books, Goin' on a Bear Hunt video & Corduroy coloring page

Week 11-Pete the Cat (White shoes) video and dance

Week 12-Pete the Cat (Wheels on the Bus) and student choice

Week 13-Promote author visit; read books

Week 14-*Llama Llama Red Pajama* by Anna Dewdney video

Week 15-Tumblebooks

Week 16-Music Therapy with Dash Robot (xylo app and accessory)

**\*\*End of First Semester**

Week 17-Froggy Gets Dressed video and Smartboard Activity

Week 18, 19 & 20-SCPBA books

Week 21-*"Snowy Day"* video & feet tracings

Week 22-*"Max Explains Everything"* (S McAnulty) and cake coloring page (higher)

[Click here to see more Lessons and Activities](#)

Week 23-Caldecott medal-Current books & Sylvester and Magic Pebble video

Week 24-Curious George St Val's Day Video & Bookmark

Week 25-*"Press Here"* book

Week 26-Dr Seuss Ebook & Whiteboard Games

Week 27-Dr Seuss Ebook & Whiteboard Games

Week 28-Wordless books

Week 29-Henkes Garden Story and Spring Coloring Page

Week 30-Sons of Poetry and Shel Silverstein

Week 31-Tomie DePaola's Bubble Factory video and Bubble Popper Game or Blow bubbles

Week 32-*Clouette* video and create letter clouds

Week 33-*Give a Mouse a Cookie* & Sequence Circle Story Activity

Week 8 - Seabiscuit (Meghan McCarthy) and race video (primary source)

Week 9 - Superhero ABC video and hero shields

Week 10 & 11-Doug Unplugged (show book video from Vimeo; Introduce Dash robot care; use Go (create a shapes-rectangle, triangle and square)

Week 12-More Mo with Naked Mole Rat, etc

Week 13-Programming a Square with a Sphero

Week 14-SCPBA book, Fly Guy and E card game

Week 15-Using Botley the robot to code a square

Week 16-Elephants Can Paint book and video

**\*\*End of First Semester**

Week 17-Engineering Day "If I Built a Car" book by Chris Van Dusen

Week 18, 19 & 20-SCPBA books

Week 21-*"Max Explains Everything"* (S McAnulty) and Grocery store cards

Week 22-*"Who wants a Tortoise"* or turtle book and SCDNR turtle hatching video & coloring page



Scan QR code for more!!

Week 23-Caldecott medal *"May I Bring a Friend?"*

Week 24-Curious George St Val's Day video and bookmark or online game

Week 25-*"Precious and the Boo Hag"* (Stranger Danger)

Week 26-Dr Seuss Ebook and Interactive Games

Week 27-Dr Seuss Ebook and Quizizz or Bingo

<p>Week 34-<i>Give a Pig a Pancake</i> and online games</p> <p>**2 weeks for Bookfairs</p>	<p>Week 28-Wordless books</p> <p>Week 29-Henkes Garden Story and Spring Coloring Page</p> <p>Week 30-Sons of Poetry and Shel Silverstein</p> <p>Week 31-More Poetry (“Loose Leashes”; “Science Project”) books</p> <p>Week 32-”Owney the Mail Pouch Pooch” book and vintage video &amp; Design your own stamp</p> <p>Week 33-Tumblebooks</p> <p>Week 34-Numeroff books and online games</p> <p>**2 weeks for Bookfairs</p>
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## ***Biography***

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**Angela Durham** has been a school librarian for over 10 years. She graduated from the University of South Carolina and is a National Board Certified Teacher. She enjoys sharing stories, robotics and technology based learning experiences. She spends her free time traveling, reading books and volunteering with her state's library association.