

“Visit the Magic Tree House” Library Program

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Introduction to the event

Mary Pope Osborne began publishing her wildly popular *Magic Tree House* series, documenting the time-traveling adventures of Jack and his sister Annie, in 1992. Since then she has published approximately 50 books under the MTH umbrella, including Research Guides that delve further into the science and history of particular stories. My event will capitalize on the popularity of this series by offering several age-appropriate activities to capture the imagination of young readers. Because this series is so large, I would kick off with this event, which focuses on books 1-10 – if it is successful, future events could focus on other books, such as the more recent Merlin Missions.

Program site

This program will be held in a public library that has a large meeting room. I would conduct this event on a weekend afternoon to maximize attendance. This event would last approximately two hours.

Target group

This series is appropriate for K-3 readers, so the target audience will be primarily 5-8 year-olds and their parents. Because the main characters are an 8-year-old boy (Jack) and a 7-year-old girl (Annie), the series and the event will appeal to both boys and girls. While fans of the series will be most likely to attend, kids who have never read the series may be intrigued to start after attending this event.

Description of the specific activity

The room will be decorated like the Frog Creek woods – large paper leaves and tree trunks, and paper “piles of books” like the ones in the tree house. Additionally, a rope ladder will be laid on the floor leading into the room so that kids will know A. where the event is, and B. that they’re entering the tree house.

Greeting each participant as they enter will be the children’s librarian, dressed as Morgan le Fay, the magical librarian who directs Jack and Annie’s adventures in the books. If the library has access to other costumes, the other staff/volunteers could be dressed as characters like the Knight (book #2), the Ninja (book #5), Cap’n Bones (book #4), or the Moon Man (book #8). Upon each child’s arrival, “Morgan” will hand him/her a golden M medallion (a fake gold coin printed with the letter M threaded on a cord) to wear during the event and take home.

To kick off the program, “Morgan” will gather the children around, tell them it’s time to have an adventure with Jack and Annie, and dramatically read a passage from one of the books where the tree house travels through time:

“The wind picked up. The tree house started to spin.

Jack squeezed his eyes shut.

The wind was whistling now. The tree house was spinning faster and faster.

Then, everything was still.

Absolutely still.” (*Afternoon on the Amazon*, p. 11)

If there’s a fan handy, it could be turned on full speed to blow on the participants during this reading to add to the special effects!

“Morgan” will then announce that it’s time for everyone to go have an adventure. The adventures will be held at different tables, and kids can rotate from table to table at their own speed. Adventures will include:

“Crafts at the Crack of Dawn”

- kids can make a Ninja puppet using a printable puppet outline from <http://www.randomhouse.com/teachers/magictH/pdf/ninja.pdf>
- they can also do their own Cro-Magnon cave painting (<http://www.randomhouse.com/teachers/magictH/pdf/cromagcave.pdf>)

“Snacks at Sundown”

- Mummy Eyeballs (raisins)
- Ninja Swords (carrot and celery sticks)
- Knight’s Shields (round crackers)
- Peanut’s Peanuts (Peanut is the kids’ mouse starting with book #5)
- Pirate Punch (juice)

“Books at the Break of Day”

- This is a resource table where participants can look at books from the series. All are available to check out. There could also be a section of books called “If you like MTH, you might also like these...”

“Brainteasers Before Noon”

- A table where kids can either complete brainteaser activities like those Jack and Annie undertake in the series, or pick up activity sheets to take home. Some examples are Knight at Dawn Word Search or Mummies in the Morning Crossword, but there are many more to choose from at

<http://www.randomhouse.com/teachers/magictH/activities.html>

“Magic Tree House Science”

- Related to Book #8. Using a scale, kids can weigh different objects, and then do the math to figure out how much they would weigh on the moon (printable for this exercise: <http://www.randomhouse.com/teachers/magictH/pdf/weight.pdf>)
- Related to Book #3. Provide materials and instructions for kids to conduct their own Fruit Mummy experiment (<http://www.unmuseum.org/exmum.htm>). Kids can get it set up, then take it home with them to observe. A kitchen scale should be provided so kids can weigh the fruit as a baseline and write the weight on their cups at the beginning of the experiment.

Sound effects could be playing in different areas of the room to emphasize the different environments Jack and Annie visit. A few examples could be animals of the rainforest (book #6, *Afternoon on the Amazon*), underwater sounds such as chattering dolphins (book #9, *Dolphins at Daybreak*), or simulated dinosaur sounds (book #1, *Dinosaurs Before Dark* – found at www.dinosounds.com or available for download on iTunes).

Describe how this activity will meet the needs of your target age group

What I love about this series is the way that Mary Pope Osborne combines elements of history, fantasy, math and science – there is truly something in the books for everyone. Not only will it be fun, but it will introduce kids to books from the series that they might not have read yet, inspire them to read other books, provide them with opportunities to learn historical/science facts, and of course, excite them about coming to the library! I have also included several different kinds of activities to help the kids synthesize the information of the books in different ways, depending on their learning styles: reading and writing activities, hands-on art, math and science activities, a listening and experiential component (sound effects, the reading of the section of the book), and sustenance for growing young bodies (who seem like they are CONSTANTLY snacking). All of the activities can be adapted for participants with disabilities (the crafts can be done either seated or standing, a signer could be available to sign the read portion of the book, there are CDs of the books that could be included on the resource table for those who prefer to listen to the stories).

Resources needed to carry out this activity

Ideally, at least four staff members/volunteers would be helpful to execute this program: the main librarian/Morgan leFay, plus people to man the craft table, snack table, and science demonstration. Required materials would include: decorations, food, materials for the Ninja puppets (paper, cardboard, glue, Popsicle sticks, markers/crayons), M medallions (probably handmade by staff prior to the event out of tin foil, cardboard, and string), and printables. The science table would require two scales (kitchen and regular household), plus a Costco quantity of baking soda, half an apple per child, plastic cups, and Sharpies.

Materials consulted in planning the activity

I consulted several websites, including:

www.magictreehouse.com
www.education.com/activity/
www.birthdaypartyideas.com
www.unmuseum.org
www.dinosaursounds.com

I also consulted the books themselves for inspiration:

Osborne, M.P. (1992). *Dinosaurs before dark*. New York: Random House.
Osborne, M.P. (1993). *The knight at dawn*. New York: Random House.
Osborne, M.P. (1993). *Mummies in the morning*. New York: Random House.
Osborne, M.P. (1994). *Pirates past noon*. New York: Random House.
Osborne, M.P. (1995). *Night of the ninjas*. New York: Random House.
Osborne, M.P. (1995). *Afternoon on the Amazon*. New York: Scholastic.
Osborne, M.P. (1996). *Sunset of the sabertooth*. New York: Scholastic.
Osborne, M.P. (1996). *Midnight on the moon*. New York: Scholastic.
Osborne, M.P. (1997). *Dolphins at daybreak*. New York: Scholastic.
Osborne, M.P. (1997). *Ghost town at sundown*. New York: Scholastic.

Event publicity

I would publicize my event on the library's website and print materials – however, my target audience is not really surfing the Internet unassisted, or picking up booklets about library events, so this type of publicity would be more directed towards the parents of participants. To grab the kids' attention, I'd make up a few posters with MTH book covers and Jack and Annie's faces on them to hang around the children's area. Because the stories in this series always revolve around books from the tree house with bookmarks in them, I'd make some colorful bookmarks with event details on them to distribute. Kids in this age group love to collect things, and as they venture into the world of chapter books, they have a need for bookmarks.

Program evaluation

I think kids will be tired after this program and be uninterested in filling out a printed survey. Instead, I would take two different approaches to evaluating the program. First, I'd ask kids as they were leaving, "Did you have a good time? What did you like best?" types of questions to get immediate feedback. I would also ask participants to register for the program in advance (although walk-ins would also be welcome), and afterwards I would email a short survey using Zoomerang or a comparable site to get feedback on the program. While this might have a limited return rate, the responses would be very useful in planning similar programs in the future.