

1,000 Books Before Kindergarten

Just what IS the 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten program?

The Bremen Public Library in Indiana offered the first 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten program, created from the inspiration found in Mem Fox's book, *Reading Magic*. It has spread from there, with libraries primarily in the Midwest and a few in the Northeast offering the program.

The program is based upon solid evidence from research findings that the more children ages 0-5 hear books read to them, the more prepared they will be to learn to read upon reaching kindergarten.

Libraries administer the program differently, but the general framework is based upon the summer reading program model of encouraging and rewarding reading with incentives. Parents of children 0-5 sign up for the program at their public library (although a few elementary schools in the Midwest offer the program too). Libraries provide the parents with reading logs to track how many books they and others read to their children. Some libraries give small incentives when the families reach certain reading milestones, like 50 books. When the families have reached 1,000 books before the child reaches kindergarten, they have successfully completed the program.

Besides having children hear 1,000 before kindergarten, program goals may include:

- ensuring kids enter kindergarten ready to read
- having an opportunity to present parents with information about early literacy
- instilling the lifelong love of reading in young children
- fostering a positive connection to the library for families and children
- reinforcing parents' role as their child's first and best teachers
- creating a network of families and children that are committed to literacy and education

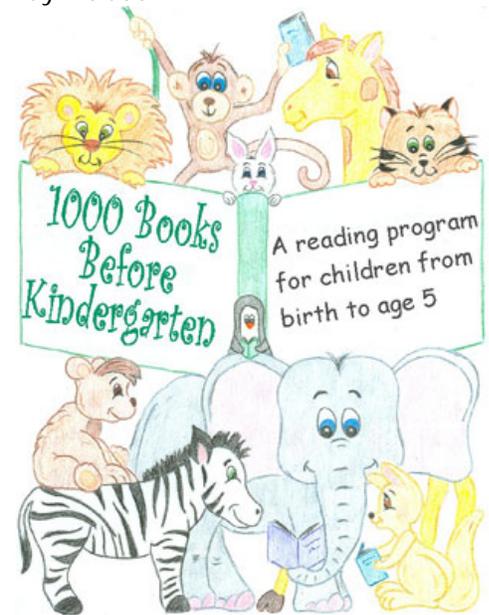


Image: Bremen Public Library, IN

How much will it cost to start and maintain the program?

The model is really flexible, and can be started and maintained with very little to a lot of funding. An inexpensive program might look like this:

- Upon registration, the family receives a simple reading log designed in-house, a list of recommended books in your collection appropriate for the child's age, info for the parents on early literacy, and info about the library including a library card application and a schedule of storytimes and other children's programs.
- After reading 25 or 50 books, the family receives a sticker on the reading log, or a bookmark. They may also get to put an item (a paper animal, star, etc) with the child's name on a bulletin board made for the program.

- After reading 250 or 500 books, the family receives a free book to keep.
- Upon completing the program, the family receives a certificate (designed in-house) and is invited to attend a once-a-year congratulations party for everyone that has finished that year; simple refreshments or more substantial fare like pizza donated by local restaurants are served, and craft time is offered.

With more funding, other items may be included:

- Upon registration, the family receives a canvas book bag with reading log sheets in a binder, an age-appropriate book and toy, info for the parents on early literacy, and info about the library including a library card application, a schedule of storytimes and other children's programs, and a list of recommended books for the child's age in your collection.
- Incentives may come more frequently and may include free books, educational toys, music CDs, puppets, puzzles, coloring books, crayons, etc.
- The annual party may include all participants with special recognition given to the "graduates." This may be elaborate.

How do parents track reading?

Parents can track reading either by recording each title or checking a box/filling in a shape to indicate one book read (the latter option may be more beneficial for parents with low literacy or low English literacy). A few libraries that offer the program allow each title to be entered only once, even if it's read over and over, but most allow parents to include the title each time they read it. Parents can include books that their children hear in library storytimes, in preschool, from other family members, and elsewhere too. If a family has more than one child enrolled in the program and someone reads the same book to all of them, all get to count the book.

While it's best for parents to join the program just after their child is born, most libraries offering the program allow them to begin anytime before their child enters kindergarten.

A good way for parents to think about is this: If they read only one book at bedtime every night for three years, they will have read 1095 books! If they read 3 books a day, they'll read 1095 books in only one year! If they begin when their child is first born and read just four books per week, they'll have read 1040 by the time the child reaches kindergarten.

How can libraries make the most of the program?

Options to enhance the program include:

- producing a quarterly newsletter (and/or blogging about the program) for all parents registered to help keep families engaged in the program and to allow another opportunity to distribute early literacy tips, book lists, your storytime schedule, and fun activities
- having a quarterly meeting of all families registered, which serves as a way to build a community network amongst families, as well as another time to impart early literacy info. Inviting other relevant community organizations can help families learn of other services available to them, and can help the library build partnerships.
- partnering with preschools, daycares, schools, nonprofits, social service agencies, Early Childhood Councils, and other organizations to cross promote services and offer joint programs

- seeking sponsors in local businesses for cash and in-kind contributions (sponsors can give to the program as a whole or can sponsor one child or family), as well as seeking funding from nonprofits and foundations
- tying the program into your summer reading program and, if it happens again, One Book 4 Colorado
- engaging great volunteers to assist with program promotion, maintaining registrant info, reading to children, etc.
- initiating the program with a community baby shower for parents-to-be and signing them up for the program before their child even arrives! (and this could be an annual event to attract new families to the program)

But what does this actually LOOK like?

- The Winding Rivers Lib System in WI has posted some examples of its program materials at <http://www.wrlsweb.org/member-services/youth-services/> (bottom left). The same librarian blogged about the program a few times: <http://tinytipsforlibraryfun.blogspot.com/2011/03/whew-launched.html> and <http://tinytipsforlibraryfun.blogspot.com/2011/08/1000-books-before-kindergarten-6-month.html>.
- The Jay County Public Library in IN provides these clear instructions and FAQs for parents: http://www.jaycpl.lib.in.us/1000_books_before_kindergarten.htm
- The Fond du Lac Public Library in WI provides a good introductory article about their program: <http://www.fdlpl.org/blog/2012/01/1000-books-kindergarten>
- This Pinterest board includes snapshots of library webpages about their programs: <http://pinterest.com/lochwouters/let-1000-books-bloom/>
- This thorough account of an elementary school program details a different model in which donated books are packaged into bags of 10 books each, which participating families check out: <http://www.slideshare.net/prsroom12/starting-a-1000-book-club-1153170>
- The Wells County Public Library in IN provides these instructions for parents as well as reading logs sheets that they can print (note that they include early literacy tips on the reading logs): <http://www.wellscolibrary.org/1000books.html>

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