

San Juan Island Library Celebrates 10 Years of After School Read Aloud with Kathy Babbitt

Written by Melina Lagios



The After School Read Aloud program at San Juan Island Library began ten years ago with a reading of *Fairy Dust and the Quest for the Egg* by Gail Carson Levine. Four children attended. Since then, After School Read Aloud has grown to capacity with more than 35 elementary school students attending to hear classic stories, including this year's selection *Peter Pan* by J.M. Barrie.

After School Read Aloud is the brainchild of Kathy Babbitt, Youth Services Associate at the San Juan Island Library. She got the idea for the program after witnessing a local mom read aloud to her children after school in the children's section of the Library.

At first the program was very informal. Kathy's mom, Dorothy Herron, assisted as a volunteer. Each week, they baked homemade chocolate chip cookies and provided milk as a snack for the group. They also created a diorama that included illustrations by Dorothy, and collections of miniature characters from the story.



The program was successful and Kathy's After School Read Aloud was renewed for a second year. The next book selection was *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett. Kathy and

her mom created a beautiful walled garden for the story. Word of the program quickly spread and After School Read Aloud went from four students in those early days to more than 30 students.

Over the last decade, Kathy has read a variety of stories, including *Anne of Green Gables*, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, and *The Indian in the Cupboard*. She also has done repeat readings of *Mary Poppins*, *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, *101 Dalmatians*, *Pollyanna*, and *Treasure Island*.

Though Kathy's mom no longer volunteers, her imprint on the program remains. New volunteers help each week and creating the dioramas is a central part of the curriculum. And, the homemade treats are still made regularly. In fact, Kathy estimates that she has baked more than 17,000 cookies. With additional funding from the Friends of the San Juan Island Library, Kathy also provides juice, cheese, crackers, and several alternative snacks for children with special dietary needs and she graciously donates the fresh fruit.



Now in its tenth year and thanks to continued interest in reading stories aloud, a whole new generation of island children will hear classic tales, making After School Read Aloud one of the Library's most treasured programs, worth repeating to make it a community tradition.