

Ghost Story Programs

at the Library

Programs have varied from 2nd grade through teen (and even some young adults!). Below are collected ideas for stories, ambience and activities, as well as some tips and anecdotes from ALSC librarians who have run this sort of program. Thanks to all who contributed! – Liz Gotauco, Middleborough Public Library, MA

STORIES:

- 👤 “The Sight” by Patricia McKissack, from *The Dark Thirty* (Anitra Steel, Mid-Continent Public Library, MO)
- 👤 *Wiley and the Hairy Man*
- 👤 *Campfire Stories* and/or *Campfire Tales*, by William Forgey (Martha J. C. Cole, Chesapeake Public Library System, VA)
- 👤 *Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark* books by Alvin Schwartz (Martha, and Deanna Gouzie, McArthur Public Library)
- 👤 Stories by Robert D. San Souci (Darla L’Allier, Helmerich Library, OK)
- 👤 *Widow’s Broom* by Chris Van Allsburg
- 👤 *Calamander Chest* by Joseph Payne Brennan -YouTube the Vincent Price version (Julie Tomlianovich, South Central KS Library System)
- 👤 *Tailypo* (suggested by several)

Recommended for older kids and teens:

- 👤 "Mr. Fox" (a Bluebeard-type story – Old English tale)
- 👤 "Morgan Roehmar's Boys" from Vivian Vande Velde (teen verdict - “Amazingly creepy”)
- 👤 *All Hallows' Eve: 13 Stories*, by Vivian Vande Velde
- 👤 *A Ghost Story* by Michael Hague, and a few others.
- 👤 *Gothic!: 10 Original Dark Tales*
- 👤 *Favorite Folktales from Around the World* by Jane Yolen
- 👤 *Best-Loved Folktales of the World* by Joanna Cole. (Joella Peterson, Tumwater Timberland Regional Library WA)
- 👤 “Kate Culhane” (Old Irish Tale) (Joella and Madigan McGillicuddy)
- 👤 *The Battle of the Red Hot Pepper Weenies (and Other Warped and Creepy Tales)* by David Lubar
- 👤 *Ask the Bones* by Arielle North Olson
- 👤 *More Bones...* by Arielle North Olson and Howard Schwartz (Kristin Rubenstein, Coweta Public Library-Central Library, GA)

Younger crowd:

- 👤 "Repeat and Jump" stories, like “The Thing in the Bathroom”, “Baby Blue Bonnet”, “The Golden Arm”, etc., where you repeat a certain phrase

- 👤 www.ultimatecampresource.com/site/.../campfire-stories.html
- 👤 (Or you can just Google campfire stories) (Nancy Whetstone)
- 👤 Stories with the comedy endings like “The Viper” and “The Coffin.” - You just build up more suspense the older the kids. (Chris Mallo, Great River Regional Library MN)

- 👤 2-4th grade story/sensory activity:

Start off by having the kids sit in a circle (this could be around the "campfire" if you're going with that theme). Then I read this to them:

Once, in a small town, there lived a man named Brown. It was out of spite years ago, on this night, that he was murdered outright.

Here we have his remains.

First let's feel his brains. (Wet, squishy tomatoes. Canned whole ones work great.) *At this point, pass around a bag or container with the items inside. Give it some time to make its way around the ground. And then start the next one, and so on.

Now here are his eyes, still frozen with surprise. (Two peeled grapes)

Here are his ears. (Two good sized chunks of red pepper)

And here is his hand, rotting flesh and bone. (A latex glove filled with water and frozen. So gross!)

But his hair still grows... (Some wet and tangled up yarn)

And his heart still beats, now and then (two wet tea bags tied/stapled together to feel like a heart)

That's all there is, except for these worms. They are the ones that ate the rest of him. (Cold spaghetti noodles, or wet gummy worms)

The kids LOVED this activity! Some of them were desperate to figure out what the items really were, but they were also thrilled that it was so gross and spooky....There are many variations on this as well. (Jessica Hoptay, Enoch Pratt Free Library MD)

FOOD/ACTIVITIES/AMBIENCE:

- 👤 Silk/fan/LED artificial fires. (pricey but can be used every year)
- 👤 Recording of campfire noise, complete with crickets.
- 👤 S' mores-to-go: graham cracker cereal, mini-marshmallows and chocolate chips in a little paper cup (Thom Barthelme, Butler Children's Literature Center, IL)
- 👤 Microwave s' mores (Kristin)
- 👤 Edible campfire: http://www.ehow.com/how_2099963_make-fake-fire.html
<http://familyfun.go.com/recipes/a-campfire-you-can-eat-684387/> (Joella)
- 👤 “We had the lights off and used flashlights.” (Kristin)
- 👤 Spider snacks (Jessica H)
- 👤 Fire effect: red holiday lights wrapped around some logs (Jeffie Nicholson)

- ☞ "Pumpkin Sweet/Pumpkin Scary" contest. They could decorate a die-cut pumpkin, and win either: a package of funny Halloween stories and jokes OR a package of horror novels. (Madigan)

TIPS AND ANECDOTES:

“We did a ghost stories storytelling program around Halloween in 2008 and 2009. Both years we publicized it for the teen-aged crowd. The first year we had about 13-16 people that showed up (some were adults, some were 20-somethings, and the bulk were teens). So, we decided to do it the second year. Only 3 teens came. The first year a lot of teens had stories to tell, and prepared and brought their own. The second year the three teens just wanted to listen to the librarians tell stories... We aren't doing this program this year because of the turn-out last year. But the first year it was a great program. I always had 4 longer (15 min) stories ready to tell in case nobody came wanting to share anything. We also toyed with the idea of doing a fake campfire with colored fabric and logs with lights and fans hidden to make the fabric move and be lit up. We didn't do it, but I have heard it was a neat way to make a library-friendly campfire.” (Joella Peterson)

“The program was for boys 8-11. I had a small turn out since this was our first program. I don't know how it would work for a larger group.” (Kristin Rubenstein)

“Hint: Success lies in the suspense factor--really drag it out in a spooky voice and build the tension before springing the final line. Good luck!” (Nancy Whetstone)

“We have storytellers come in, one to do slightly spooky tales for kids 7 and under, and one the next night to do scarier stories for kids ages 8 and up. This year we're also having a local paranormal investigative team coming to our library to talk about local haunted places. (Jenn Winston, Youth Services Librarian, CA)

“I told the first story, a folktale and changed the setting to the city the library was in. Had them asking me afterwards if it was true, lol! Had to own up and show them the book. I talked to them some about storytelling then and drawing an audience in.” (Jeffie Nicholson)

“I was hoping to attract 3rd-6th graders, and prepared a few scary stories to tell, invited participants to bring a favorite scary story to share with the group...I ended up with a crazy mix of toddler/babies, and young teens. The babies moms begged me to do less scary stories, and the middle-schoolers told me that they thought my stories were "boring". (I think they were bluffing though. They looked scared when I told it!)...I ended up doing some fun ghost stories and songs (very gentle - not what I'd originally planned) for the younger crowd, then sent them off to my volunteer-manned craft tables, and then warned everyone that the "real scary stuff was about to start" ...I was a little surprised that the stories were not more popular. They loved the crafts though.” (Madigan McGillicuddy)

“The kids jump and giggle and ask for more. I ended up telling more stories than intended because of the ‘encores’”. (Nancy Whetstone, about the “Repeat and Jump” stories)