

Finding Focus

Using Digital Cameras in Library Programming

Joella Peterson



Digital photos can capture a cute moment at the library.

Inspiration often comes from random places. Mine recently came from a fond family memory.

As my older sister took pictures of my eight-year-old niece and seven-year-old nephew with her digital camera, I noticed that the two could hardly pose long enough to take the picture. As soon as my sister pressed the camera button, they were anxious to look at the digital display of their newly made photograph.

An hour or so later, I saw my sister holding my eighteen-month-old nephew with one arm and her digital camera in the other hand. As soon as the picture was taken, the toddler would grab the camera and pull it so he could see his picture on the camera screen, over and over again. I realized at this moment that kids love technology, and they especially love seeing themselves almost instantaneously thanks to a digital camera.

With that in mind, here are a few library program ideas built around using a digital camera:

- *Shoot and Show* programs bring the amusement of taking pictures and the instant gratification of their images to children.
- *Click and Create* programs allow children to photograph objects around the library. Using a little computer magic, a

color printer, some laminating skills, even an amateur photographer can create a library program.

- *Look and Learn* programs. These passive programs encourage kids to think and interact with bulletin boards or displays whenever they are at the library. Quick to create, librarians can use these programs to build positive relationships with patrons while keeping up with their own ever-growing to-do lists.

Shoot and Show

Book Scenes

Gather all those random costume accessories, craft supplies, and puppets from the youth services closets. Have a few picture books available for inspiration. Divide kids into groups, and have each group pick a scene to mimic from a book illustration. Each group will then re-create that scene and take a picture.

Print photographs for a program souvenir or use them as a display along with the book illustration. In libraries that enjoy going the extra mile, create a contest in which library patrons vote on the most realistic, the most creative, or most humorous book scenes.



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Character Costumes

Along the same lines, many kids like dressing up. Have the library host an enormous dress-up party. Have a few sheets hung around the meeting room as a backdrop for the mock photography studio. Take pictures of the kids in their costumes and print the photographs.

Libraries might have some extra supplies or props on hand to help create particular shots. For example, a blue sheet and some white paper clouds make an excellent superhero backdrop. A stool and a paper “Wanted” sign hung on a brown sheet might make a fun Western-themed memory. Print photographs or e-mail them to parents. If a library has a large program planned, such as a Fairy Tea Party, have a few spots to take photographs of character costumes.

Fun Faces

Find a large cardboard box, such as one from an appliance store. Cut the box at all four corners, then cut one or two holes the size of a kid’s face on each side of the box. Then, paint a few scenes on the box sides with the holes missing faces of mermaids, dragons, robots, or other characters.

Prop the cardboard sides up with chairs or stools. Use the many panels of “fun faces” to create a library program or use it to supplement other programs. Place a library in the background to use the box to promote library card sign-up month (remember to give the characters library cards to hold) or put a box side in the back of the story time room to celebrate Children’s Book Week.

Click and Create Programs

Itty Bitty Library

Growing up, I played a game called “Itty Bitty Salt Lake City.” Every year, our local newspaper, the *Deseret News*, would take pictures of small bits and pieces of Salt Lake City buildings, signs, or landscapes, all within a certain radius of city blocks. Photographs might include an intricate letter from a sign, an interesting piece of a fence, or the hand on a statue. The



Ready for action...and close-ups!



Learning how to use digital cameras is a great experience for kids.

newspaper printed these pictures, and contestants would scour the city looking for the location of the photographs.

With that idea in mind, take pictures of random things in or around the library. Snap a shot of an unusual design on a plant's pot, an attractive swirl on a light fixture, or a fascinating crack on the sidewalk. Take pictures of a dozen or so "itty bitty" things. Then print a few papers with the photographs. Invite patrons to take a closer look at the library to find each object in the photographs.

Scavenger Hunt

One idea for a library scavenger hunt begins with taking pictures of a few items—books, staff members, storytime puppets. Print photographs of the items and place them around the library. A stuffed animal might hold one photograph, or a picture might be placed above the drinking fountain. Give kids a list of the photographs or a sheet of paper with pictures of all the photos to find and send them around the library to look for them.

For older kids, make a scavenger hunt by taking a picture of one thing—such as the library director holding a sign that says "I Like Reading Comic Books!" or a picture of the library building on one side and a typed message on the back. Print in Microsoft Publisher or a similar program to enlarge the photo so it is larger than a standard piece of paper. Print all the various pieces and scatter them around the library. Kids must then search for the pieces and then put it together to decipher the message. To make this even more exciting, kids might have to complete a challenge to collect each puzzle piece.

Memory

Make a library-specific memory game. Photograph things around the library, such as a library pet, a book display, or the book drop. Print two of each picture and mount them on colored paper. Have kids take turns flipping over cards. For a more challenging game, take pictures of pairs. For example: a chair and a table, a light and a light bulb, a trash can and a recycle bin. Print each picture and mount it to colored paper.

Look and Learn Programs

I Spy

Grab all the random items lurking in the children's department closets or desks. Group a couple dozen items together and take a picture. Switch out half of the items, add new items, and then rearrange it all. Repeat until you have taken pictures of all the items you can think of. Create a word or picture list of half a dozen items in each photograph. Print the photographs and the lists and display them one by one in a certain section of the library. Parents and children will enjoy "spying" various objects together.

What's Different

While photographing those random objects for the I Spy program, create a What's Different picture or two as well. Use the setup for one of the I Spy pictures, but before moving on to the next photograph, move some of the objects and take a second picture. For example, rotate a baseball so that the stitches face different directions. Or roll a number 2 pencil so the words don't show. Print the two photographs and display them side-by-side. Create a sign that lets patrons know there are a dozen or so different things in the two photographs and ask them if they can spot What's Different.

Picture It

Pick a favorite children's concept (color, texture, or the alphabet) and take pictures of that concept. You might find

great colors on the walls, a jar of yellow pencils, or a grey drinking fountain. The library is full of textures; the carpet might look bumpy, the counter might seem smooth, or a pair of scissors might appear sharp. Look for letters in objects around the library such as a *T* on a window pane or an *O* in the opening in a pencil sharpener.

With each of the concepts, create signs that list the colors, textures, or some of the letters of the alphabet. Print the photographs and signs, and ask kids if they can match the concepts to the photograph. For added fun, create a rebus by taking pictures of objects, putting them in a specific order, and seeing if patrons can figure out what it is supposed to say. For example, take a picture of a head and some shoulders, knees, and "toes," and see if young patrons can guess the song.

With a digital camera and a few other supplies, a library can make lasting memories. Youth services librarians also can turn these programs into digital programs. Make an online slideshow or create an online guessing game of I Spy on the children's department webpage.

Patrons could even participate in an online photo contest. Digital cameras have become such a magical part of everyday life, and they can become a delightful part of many library programs, tailored to fit in every library schedule and with every type of young patron. ☺

Photos by Nicole Davis.



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