

Spring Creative Reading Planned

BY PORT NEWS STAFF

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In a partnership with SEPTA (Special Education PTA) and Elise May of Storytime Theater, the Port Washington Public Library will co-sponsor Creative Readers for the school year.

"It's a wonderful program that pairs teen mentors and grade school children, said Rachel Fox, director of Children's Services at the library. "It's a rewarding experience for all participants that helps build self-confidence and an understanding and appreciation for people of all learning abilities."

The fall and winter sessions filled quickly. The spring session dates are: March 1, 8, 15, 22, 29 and April 5.

Parents interested in signing up their child or high school students interested in volunteering, can contact Ann Marie Fitzpatrick at creativereadersinport@yahoo.com. Class sizes are limited and applications are accepted on a first-come, first serve basis. "Creative Readers has shown that children of varying abilities can participate together and experience new ways to love reading," Fitzpatrick said.

The program began in 2012, Port SEPTA co-president Ann Marie Fitzpatrick approached Elise May to create an inclusive literacy program where special learners could have high school buddies and connect socially with their community.

May devised Creative Readers, whose mission is to increase the joy of reading for K-5 grade students by turning books into a multi-sensory experience offering all learners the ability to be challenged, motivated

and successful.

Each lesson would focus on a book and have a drama, art, movement or music activity. The program also offers a space for unique learners of all kinds, some of whom are schooled outside the district, to socialize and work together creatively. "The library was the ideal location for this program. They welcomed us with open arms and a willingness to learn and grow with the program," said May, the program's director.

Initially, library staff were trained by a SEPTA specialist in how to best serve to families of children with special needs. High school and middle school volunteers were also trained in the behavioral and creative aspects of the program.

"This program benefits everyone involved," May said. "It offers social, academic and emotional growth for all—it's truly a win-win situation."

Leah Weingast, a former high school buddy, said the student she worked with, "showed me how much I have to offer others. I've enjoyed encouraging him to love reading. Creative Readers provided me with training so that I could understand what life is like for a child who has special needs. It provides such an incredible forum to let the children express themselves in theatrical ways, to become more comfortable in social situations, and to see books in a less threatening light."

Initially, Creative Readers was funded by a SEPTA grant from National Philoptochos Society's Children's Medical Fund. Now, the library gives the program a home, and co-sponsors with SEPTA and Storytime Theater.



Creative Readers rehearsing "King Bidgood's in the Bathtub"



Performing "Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs"



Rehearsing "The Crayon Box that Talked"