

Stories into Art

A Critical Review with Guidelines for Further Action

Executive Summary

The Stories into Art Project ran in Kingston Libraries from February 18 to April 30 as the launch activity in Kingston to celebrate the National Year of Reading. It was also a pilot to explore the benefits of running a spring competition open to the public, schools and community groups which would act as a marketing tool to attract sponsors and partners, and provide a framework for planning activities in Libraries.

This report looks at how and why the competition was run, the interest it attracted, how it compared with similar competitions, and sets out the recommendations and guidelines for running future competitions.

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Stories into Art

Introduction

I devised the Stories into Art Competition in Kingston to celebrate the National Year of Reading. Open to the public, schools, and community groups, it invited people to choose a book or audio book from Kingston Libraries, and to produce a piece of writing or art inspired by what they had read or listened to. Stories into Art ran from February 18 to April 30, and was supported by library and museum events. This report looks at the reasons why it was run, examines its success, and gives recommendations on planning future competitions.

Why a competition?

- 1) Customer participation and feedback from similar activities; for example the annual Summer Reading Challenge to read six books over the summer holidays; has shown that children and young people enjoy competitions. The number of people participating in the Summer Reading Challenge has been rising year on year. Last year 2159 children took part, (compared to 1400 in 2003) a clear indicator that this type of activity is popular.
- 2) In July 2007, a survey run by CIPFA, 'CIPFA Plus' took place over two weeks in Kingston Libraries to ascertain children's, young people's and parents/carers' views of the Library Service. Of the 1330 participants, 60.1% said that they had been to an event or activity in the Library indicating the popularity of book related activities. Five respondents specifically requested more competitions.
- 3) This year RBK has produced 'The Best Place to Live', A Cultural Strategy for Kingston 2008-12. This strategy is based on a series of meetings held with key cultural organisations in spring and summer 2007. Of the five key aims that have been established for the strategy, three relate to the Library Service and the objectives of Stories into Art

'Encouraging all residents, especially young people, to get involved (as participants and as volunteers) in cultural activities'

'Finding ways to encourage and develop residents' creativity in the performing arts and media based art forms'

'Improving literacy through promotion and support for the development of reading in children, young people, people with basic skills needs and in families'

- 4) During the consultation for the Cultural Strategy, price was frequently mentioned as a barrier to participation, particularly amongst young people. Running a competition with related free activities removed such a restriction, providing equality of opportunity for everyone.
- 5) 2008 is the National Year of Reading and I was keen to celebrate this special year, highlighting the importance of the Library Service to stakeholders, attracting new users, and establishing sustainable improvements to service. There was no funding to hold activities, so clearly some creativity would be required to maximise existing

resources and attract new partners. A competition offered a low cost opportunity to achieve these aims.

- 6) Whilst on a visit to The Imperial War Museum with my family, I had noticed that staff were inviting children to draw a picture of their favourite exhibit and putting the drawings on display. I watched my children and other youngsters enjoying themselves, and I thought that a similar activity would be fun and simple to run in libraries.
- 7) At a Children's Team Meeting I ran a brainstorming session on ideas to celebrate the National Year of Reading. I suggested Stories into Art as one of the possible activities, and feedback from the team was very positive.
- 8) I knew that the Head of Service was keen to encourage the Children's and Adult Library teams to work together to produce offers and activities that encompassed all ages, and thus attract adults as well as young people to use the library service, and Stories into Art offered this potential.

Drawing up the Stories into Art offer

I wanted the competition to be open to everyone of all ages, abilities, and cultural background. I decided the best way to achieve this was to invite people to read or listen to a story (which would allow young children, and people with varying levels of literacy skills to participate). For the same reason I decided to invite people to submit entries in a variety of mediums – art, photography or writing.

The competition would have two sections – A competition open to all RBK Schools for the best class entry for Stories into Art. There would be a prize of £300 for the School and a presentation to which the class would be invited to receive their prize from a celebrity, possibly Kingston's local writer and top national children's author, Jacqueline Wilson. The other section would be open to the public with prizes in the following age groups; under 8, 8-12, 13-18, 19-25, Over 25s. Winners of these categories would win £50.

I also wanted to add an incentive for every participant, based on the idea of the Summer Reading Challenge where everyone wins stickers and small prizes, such as pens and fridge magnets as they complete the books. I decided to approach DC Leisure who I had worked with previously on the Summer Reading Challenge, as I knew that the Manager was keen to attract adults, and Stories into Art might offer a small marketing opportunity. The idea was that every entry for the competition taken in at Kingston Libraries would receive a free swim/ play session voucher depending on age. This incentive would also contribute to achieving one of the other priorities mentioned in the Cultural Strategy, - 'increasing physical activity to improve health and check the rise in obesity.'

The competition would be supported by storytelling and craft activities in libraries and community groups as far as staffing resources allowed.

Having compiled my draft proposal, I contacted and arranged to meet the prospective sponsors. I had picked Surbiton Estate Agents, Matthew James as potential sponsors for the prizes because two years previously I had been impressed with a piece in the local Chamber of Commerce Magazine detailing a computers for schools project they had supported. I had photocopied the article for my ideas file and thought now was a good

time to approach them. I met their marketing agent, and presented my ideas, showing her press cuttings of previous successful library activities. She was keen on the idea and was able to confirm sponsorship. Fortunately I was planning six months in advance, so Jacqueline Wilson's agent was also able to confirm that Jacqueline had kindly agreed to do the presentation on June 5 having no other engagements.

Having got these sponsorship agreements in place, I explained my idea to the manager of DC Leisure, who was enthusiastic and was able to confirm a free play session voucher for every participant under four, a swim voucher for every 5-18 year old and a one week gym pass for everyone over 18.

Timing

The next thing was to decide when the competition would run. Due to funding of the national co-ordinator posts, The National Year of Reading didn't officially start until April 1, but I thought it would be beneficial to run an activity early in the year which would serve as a launch event. Some term time was needed to allow schools to participate, and holiday time to enable libraries to run related activities. I therefore set February 18 to April 30 as the dates for the competition as these encompassed two school holidays and one half term. This time of year is also fairly quiet so there were no other competing activities.

Publicity

Having confirmed dates and sponsorship, I consulted colleagues about wording for the competition. The invitation to schools and playgroups would be in the form of a letter, but the public competition would be advertised using posters. The wording had to be concise, instantly comprehensible, and suitable for a poster. After a trial run with colleagues I compiled the following;

'Celebrate the National Year of Reading 2008

Join the Stories into Art Competition at Kingston Libraries by selecting a library book or audio book that you have found enjoyable or inspirational

Use the story to create a painting, drawing, photograph, poem or piece of writing associated with the subject.

Put your name, address, and phone number on the back of your entry with the author and title of the book that has inspired your work

Stories into Art will run from February 18 until April 30 and is open to everyone. Prizes of £50 will be awarded in the following age categories;

Under 8, 8-12, 13-18, 19-25, over 25s

All entrants under 18 will receive a free swim or play session voucher and entrants over 18 will receive a free one week leisure pass on handing in their entry at their local Kingston Library'

This wording became the basis for all publicity for the public competition. A member of Kingston Library staff kindly agreed to design two posters (see appendix) incorporating the wording, and I used these to promote the competition in the following ways;

- 1) On the Kingston Libraries, and Kingston Museum's web pages
- 2) Sending out on my mailing lists to stake holders
- 3) Displays and handouts in Kingston Libraries
- 4) RBK's Easter Activities for Children and Young People Brochure (see appendix)
- 5) Press release to local press
- 6) Wording on the February 'Staff Update' (this is a newsletter which goes to all RBK staff with their monthly pay slip) (appendix)
- 7) The Libraries e-newsletter 'Connections'
- 8) Handouts at Kingston's Literacy Festival
- 9) Slogan on Kingston Libraries' February Half Term and April School Holiday Activities Posters (appendix)
- 10) Kingston Museum Newsletter

I promoted the schools' competition by sending a letter on the schools' mailing list to all Head teachers, and to contacts I had on my mailing list, for example Literacy Co-ordinators and Early Years' teachers.(see appendix)

Meetings

I also used meetings to promote Stories into Art. This had the added benefit that information would appear in the minutes circulated to people who didn't attend. In this way I used the Extended Schools Services Meeting, a meeting attended by Children's Centre Staff and external partners, and the Libraries Management Team Meetings attended by team leaders of different services – operations, adult services, ICT, and learning services.

The Children's Team Meetings and one to ones were also very useful for keeping staff informed of what was happening, obtaining feedback and ideas, and planning related events and activities.

Stories into Art events

Running the competition on its own wouldn't be enough to get people interested. To help promote Stories into Art and provide opportunities for people to participate, I talked to staff about running related events. The Youth Librarian had some money left in her budget to spend, and kindly agreed to organise two creative writing workshops with Children's Author, Elizabeth Kay as a run up to the competition in February. Staff agreed to hold craft and storytelling events in the school holidays.

The April School Holidays provided a very good opportunity to promote the competition as the early Easter this year meant that it wasn't possible to run the usual Easter events in the holiday, and Librarians were looking for a theme on which to base their activities. Stories into Art provided a simple solution – do some storytelling, follow up with a craft activity and get the children to enter their work for the competition. The incentive of a free voucher was very popular and provided a nice conclusion to the sessions.

In addition Library Managers agreed to run coffee mornings to get people looking at new books, and to talk to them about the competition. Librarians promoted Stories into Art at adult and youth reading groups in the Libraries, and at reading groups and story sessions in schools and playgroups. Kingston Museum promoted the competition and tied it in with three 'Drawing the Story Out Workshops'.

I also approached Family Learning, who have used our libraries to put on events in the past, and they agreed to run six Stories into Art Drawing Workshops at five libraries where tutors would use a selection of short stories and poems from library stock to work with families to enable them to create art work

By now, as word was spreading about Stories into Art, I started getting enquiries, and it quickly became apparent that community groups wanted to participate as a group not as individuals, and that some people wanted to enter sculptures and murals. Because of the practicalities of storing 3D entries, I had already decided to restrict entry to 2D, but the idea of a community prize was very good, so I approached Matthew James to ask them for another £100 for a community group/mural prize to which they kindly agreed. I put news of this revision on our web pages and in mail outs to stakeholders.

As the starting date of the competition drew near I compiled a Stories into Art Procedure (appendix) and circulated it to all staff, asking them to let me know if they had any queries.

Running the Competition

Once the competition was underway I wanted to ensure that staff kept promoting it, and that interest didn't die after an initial flurry. Although I succeeded in getting photographs of Library Children's events in the Kingston Informer at Half Term, Stories into Art wasn't directly mentioned, so staff promotion was really important. Besides ensuring that Stories into Art was on the agenda at one to ones and Children's Team Meetings, I arranged to visit the libraries and photograph their displays. This allowed me the opportunity to talk to staff and encourage their good work. I put the photograph of one of the best displays in the March issue of the Staff e-magazine, Connections, and a quote from another Library Manager saying how by displaying stock face on in a Stories into Art display, she had managed to kindle interest in stock that hadn't been out for a while.

Over the half term, at the invitation of Kingston Welcare, a centre for disadvantaged families, I had run a Rhymetime, and a storytelling session for older children. When they had asked me to visit them I told them about Stories into Art, suggesting they might like to run some accompanying craft activities to my sessions so that the children could enter. The workers thought this was a good idea, and after the sessions the children went off to do some drawing and painting. I took some photos, and put a photo and article in

Connections as a way of publicising the competition and possibly giving other staff some ideas for outreach work.

I continued to mention the competition at all relevant meetings, and asked the RBK Literacy Consultant, Lindsay Pickton, to be a judge. By involving him I thought I would get a very useful advocate as he liaises with all RBK schools. In fact he was also able to suggest some very helpful contacts.

During the period of the competition both Kingston and Tolworth Libraries closed for refurbishment (Kingston Adult Library until March 31 and Tolworth Library for two weeks) This had an impact on the take up of the competition, and Tolworth staff on reopening were worried that interest was low. I suggested that they had drawing/writing materials on hand during the April School Holidays and weekends so that children could, if they wanted, produce some work in the library rather than wait for a special event or to do something at home. This idea, staff said, worked well.

Statistics

The take up, for the first year of what hopefully may become an annual spring event, was good. 915 people took part, the majority of entries coming from schools

Stories into Art Statistics

Stories into Art Public Competition

Under 8	8-12	13-18	19-25	Over 25	Total
141	55	15	10	22	243

Stories into Art Community Groups/Mural Competition

Yorda Adventures at Dysart School	Tamil Saturday School	Kingston Welcare	Total
8	7	13	28

Stories into Art Schools Competition

Lovelace Nursery	84
Moor Lane Workplace Nursery	6
Castle Hill Primary School	46 (Year 1)
Coombe Hill Infants	83 (Year 2)
Ellingham Primary School	95 (Years 2,3,5 & 6)
The Mount	17 (Year 6)
St John's C of E Primary School	106 (Reception and Years 3,4,5,&6)
St Mary's C of E Primary School	44 (Year 5)
St Paul's C of E primary School	129 (Year 5)
Southborough High School	24 (Year 7)
Tolworth Girls	10 (Year 7)
Total	644

What went well

- 1) Feedback about the competition was very positive. Changes in the teaching of the National Curriculum have meant that teachers are looking for more ways of cross curricular teaching, and Stories into Art offered this opportunity.
- 2) Staff liked the competition because it gave them a framework for related library activities
- 3) The Stories into Art displays provided a practical demonstration of the value of face on display for shifting stock – a useful lesson for some staff
- 4) The Librarian at Hook succeeded in getting participation in Stories into Art as a Chessington Children's Centre target, which was very helpful in encouraging local schools' participation
- 5) The free vouchers were very successful in providing an incentive to participate – particularly in the public competition amongst the under fives
- 6) Community groups liked the idea of the competition as it offered the opportunity to discuss, plan, and work collaboratively on a mural.
- 7) During discussion with a volunteer co-ordinator working with language schools, it emerged that in some cultures embroidery is an important art medium. This might be useful to take into consideration when planning future competitions
- 8) Following the Prizegiving I compiled a press release, and photographs for our website www.kingston.gov.uk/libraries, sponsors and judges, and for the Libraries E-Newsletter Connections. Jane Goddard, Marketing Agent for Matthew James said that she would also try to get it in the Kingston Chamber of Commerce Magazine

What didn't work

- 1) The Family Learning Drawing Workshops were not very successful mainly because the timing after school was unpopular with families already involved in regular after school activities. Following discussion with the Family Learning Co-ordinator, we have decided to run any future events of this type in school holidays or at weekends
- 2) Take-up of the Community Group Prize was poor. This was because it was a late addition to Stories into Art, and had much less publicity. Given the initial interest, there is a lot of future potential to increase the participation of community groups
- 3) Take-up of the competition from adults was low (32). The closure of Tolworth Library and Kingston Adult Library doubtless had an effect. There may also have been a perception among some staff that as I was running it, it was a children's service initiative, and as such should be promoted to children and young people.
- 4) The coffee mornings, a good idea to get people into the library and interested in the competition, did not happen. I did not have time to support staff, and unfilled vacancies and the end of the annual leave year meant that branch libraries were very short staffed
- 5) The judges of the competition said that they found it difficult to decide winners in the under 8s as the age range was too wide. Also having only one prize for art and written pieces was a problem as it was very difficult to compare the two mediums, and select a winner.

- 6) Unfortunately Jacqueline Wilson was unwell, and unable to attend the prize giving. At short notice I arranged for two Storytellers to attend, and the winning School Class, Castle Hill School Red Class were happy. However the lack of a celebrity meant that although the Kingston Informer photographer attended, nothing appeared in the local newspaper.

At the prize giving I talked to sponsors, and asked if they would mind completing a short questionnaire to give their views on the value of backing the competition. (see appendix) Both Jane Goddard (the Marketing Agent for Matthew James) and Fiona Nugent, DC Leisure were enthusiastic, and said that they would like to see a similar competition run again on an annual basis, and would be prepared to support it. Fiona mentioned that the DC Leisure Managers were pleased that there had been a good take-up of the adult gym passes generating more custom.

I also reported on Stories into Art at the June Extended Schools Services Providers Meeting and asked for ideas on improving the take-up from schools. The suggestion was made that instead of having one schools' prize, a good incentive to get staff on board promoting and participating in the competition, would be to have one prize for each schools cluster (there are 4). There would then be much competition within the cluster to see who was best!

Comparison with similar competitions run in Kingston Libraries and recommendations

The most comparable competition is the annual Summer Reading Challenge for children and young people to read six books over the summer holidays. This has been running for ten years in Kingston Libraries. Like Stories into Art it runs for approximately ten weeks, but the difference is that it is a national scheme run by The Reading Agency and offers collectors' wallets and stickers and small prizes such as pens and fridge magnets for the children to collect as they read their books. Last year 2159 children and young people participated.

In the summer of 2007 a photography competition for adults was held in Kingston Library attracting 25 participants, and a James Bond quiz recently attracted 2 participants.

Given that 2008 was the first time Stories into Art was run, a take-up of 915 is encouraging. Running one themed activity provided a framework for planning and team working, maximised resources, was easier to market than several small individual activities, and provided good opportunities for partnership work. The publicity from the presentation of prizes and the displays of entries will also be very useful for promoting the Library Service.

There is much potential for improving the organisation and promotion of the competition, running more related events for the public and attracting a greater number of school and community groups.

Would it be a good idea to run the event on an annual basis, including it in the Libraries and Heritage Service Team Plan and Cultural Strategy? Museum staff have been enthusiastic about the idea, but some library staff might resist a project that would mean more work at a time of staffing cuts. Could I demonstrate a case for change? To reach a decision I used the force field analysis model

Forces for change	Score	Change proposal	Forces against change	Score
Popular with customers – potential for more visits/issues	4	The establishment of an annual spring Arts Competition open to the public, schools and community groups supported by a programme of Library and Museum events	Some staff will perceive the competition and activities as extra work at a time of cost cutting	4
Meets objectives of RBK Cultural Strategy	3		Unlikely to be much money available to fund the project	4
Provides good marketing tool and a focus for the planning and organisation of library events	4		Support and training will be needed for those staff uncertain about running events	2
Would encourage the Adult and Children's Teams to work together	3			
Can be used as a training tool for new staff	3			
The strategic approach provides an opportunity to maximise our resources	4			
Total	21		Total	10

Having worked through the decision model I feel that there is a very good case for change. An arts competition and events programme using staffing resources is a low cost marketing tool which meets many of the objectives of the RBK Cultural Strategy, and Directorate Team Plan whilst also attracting visitors, and increasing the profile of the Libraries and Heritage Service – increasingly important in a cuts climate. Failure to develop the Libraries and Museum Service could lead to stagnation and vulnerability if services are perceived as unchanging, and irrelevant to the needs of the community.

These are the recommendations I would make;

- 1) The Stories into Art idea should be presented at a Libraries Management Team Meeting for adoption as an annual spring competition, and as part of Kingston's Cultural Strategy. Promoting and running this event would then be an objective in the Libraries and Heritage Service Team Plan for the Operations, Learning, Museum, and Reading Resources Teams, and as such would attract more staffing resources.
- 2) Each Team would agree to contribute a certain number of events depending on resources and complexity. For example the Operations Team could provide one Coffee Morning per library to promote the Competition and new stock. The Lifelong Learning team might work with Adult Education to run related computer workshops. The Adult Librarians could contribute extra or special one off themed Book Groups or writing workshops. The Childrens and Youth Librarians could contribute craft and storytelling events, Manga computer workshops or themed Book Groups. The Museum could tie in an exhibition and activity(ies) to the Competition theme.
- 3) Targets would be set at one to ones/appraisals and discussed at Team Meetings
- 4) Planning for the spring competition should start in early autumn the preceding year with a steering group meeting of Library and Museum Staff. These would then liaise with relevant key potential partners eg Early Years, Schools, Youth, Age Concern, Adult Education, and Community Groups
- 5) Clear categories should be established within the competition ie Prizes for the best/most entries per schools cluster, Public Prizes – ages under fives, 6-8, 9-11, 12-14, 14-18, and over 18, and a Community Group prize.
- 6) Clear rules should be set for the Competition eg size of entry, whether it will be possible to return entries.
- 7) The competition should include embroidery and collage
- 8) An attractive feedback form should be designed and used to collect customer comments and ideas for future competitions and events
- 9) A future tie in with performances at Kingston's new Theatre, The Rose should be investigated.

Conclusion

An annual spring competition, supported by a Libraries and Museums events programme would provide a useful marketing tool, and act as a focus for attracting sponsors, partners, and customers. It responds to customer requests for more Library activities and competitions, and meets the requirements of Kingston's Cultural Strategy. It also provides a planning framework for staff, encouraging cross team working and collaboration.