

Paint the Blue REaD



Billy Booksie Guide



A guide to all things Booksie

What is Paint the Blue REaD?

Paint the Blue Read (PTBR) is an early literacy initiative of the Stronger Families Alliance and is auspiced by Mountains Outreach Community Service (MOCS).

The PTBR program began in the Blue Mountains in 2008, developed by a collaborative working party comprising early childhood teachers, librarians, community workers, bookshop staff, Rotarians and community members. Working parties continue to meet regularly to plan, promote and carry out activities and programs that encourage early literacy throughout the Blue Mountains.

The aim of PTBR is to encourage all levels of the community to support the development of local children's early literacy skills from birth and to make this a lot of fun for everyone!

Paint the Blue REaD's mascots are Billy Booksie and his sister Billie. The Booksies make guest appearances throughout the Blue Mountains wherever children are gathering for a story and a song - at early childhood centres, playgroups, local festivals and more.

The many FREE PTBR early literacy activities include:

- Simultaneous Story Time
- Winter Magic Story Time
- Annual Reading Week
- Fortnightly story sessions in Leura shops
- Monthly story reading at Glenbrook Rotary Market

To find out more contact:

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Why is Early Literacy Important?

Reading to babies goes a long way towards giving them the best possible start in life and providing them with the brightest possible futures.

Scientists now know that the first few years of a child's life are when the most important development of the brain takes place. The first few years are when the baby's brain is programmed or wired for life.

To work well, the brain needs to have strong connections (synapses) formed between its many tiny signal towers (neurons). A newborn baby's brain does not have these connections. They form as the baby is stimulated by the world around it. Every time a baby is spoken to, touched, cuddled, fed or bathed, signals race through its brain between the signal towers, forming connections. The first three years of life are when most of these connections in the brain are formed.

Reading to a baby every day provides the rich environment that helps wire the brain so that it will grow as big, strong and intelligent as possible. When a baby is read to every day it paves the way for him or her to become a good reader - to become literate.

Waiting until preschool or school to introduce children to books is too late! Children who are read to regularly in the first years of life are far more likely to have reading success at school than those who aren't read to.

The children who learn to read quickly and easily are those who come to school knowing a wide range of words and sounds, the alphabet, a number of nursery rhymes and the way print works. They know these things because they have been read to for a number of years already!

Why have a Mascot?

The Booksies are an important facet of Paint the Blue Read. Through regular appearances and consistency of character, Billy & Billie have already begun to capture the imaginations of Blue Mountains children.

Continuing and developing these mascots' presence in our community will allow:

- Program identity and identification
- Flexibility in advertising
- The creation of a community icon
- Accessibility– everyone can get involved
- Children to engage in ways they can have

FUN FUN FUN

The Booksie Costume

Booksies cannot always be everywhere they are wanted and sometimes they need people to help so that children will not be disappointed and miss out on stories. There are special costumes for these occasions.

When borrowing the costume, please:

- ◇ Store the suit in the bag provided. Make sure the suit is concealed from children as you arrive and depart from an event.
- ◇ NEVER, EVER get into / out of the suit where children can see you.
- ◇ NEVER, EVER take the costume head off where children can see you.

CARE INSTRUCTION:

Please **do not clean or dry the costume** anywhere near heat or a blow dryer.

The costume can be washed only occasionally. The face is heat-sculpted and therefore no direct heat should be applied or it will lose its form. So please be careful in the suit.

If it gets dirty please do not wash it - the MOCS Carers are very understanding of mishaps and would rather do it. If the costume gets wet, please hang it / place the head where air can circulate as soon as you can remove it from children's sight.



Being a Booksie Minder

Be excited - the Minder needs personality! Booksie is the focus BUT the Minder creates the experience. Remember - Booksies can't use their face to express emotions, you have communicate the Booksie's emotions as well as your own.

Be dressed in a way that clearly identifies you as the Minder: if possible in Booksies' colours - **red and blue**.

If possible have **another support person** to help you - especially if there's going to be a big crowd at the event.

Ensure Booksie is safe: plan ahead, especially your entry and exit; stand behind Booksie to avoid children 'tackling' from behind; have Booksie sitting before children give hugs; have signals worked out with Booksie - especially if Booksie needs to leave suddenly.

Ensure all children are safe: Booksies can't see very well and it's easy for them to bump into or tread on little people, especially if there a lot of children crowding around them.

What story will you use? Make sure it is age appropriate, not too long, lots of pictures.

Tell a story - don't 'read' : respond to the children and what they notice; make it up from the pictures.

Mix up stories and songs. If the children are loosing interest, bring them back with a song.

Use stories and songs that have **BIG actions** so the Booksie can get involved

Think about how will you make it **FUN FUN FUN** for both children and parents?

What will you give **parents** to take home?

What will you give **children** to take home?

What's the **take-home message** for parents/guardians? Be clear about the message & repeat, repeat, repeat.

Babies brains need...
Stories, rhymes and play
Every single day

'Being' a Booksie



Make sure you can cope being in the costume. If you've never worn the suit before, put it on before the event. Get used to how it feels:

- how much (little) you can see
- how hot it gets
- what happens when you move in the suit
- vision is very limited
- all your senses are dulled.

Be animated. Use your whole body to express emotions -practice before hand. In the suit, you can't talk and you can't use your face to express emotions.

Remain hydrated. The suit will be hot, especially in warm weather, so drink plenty of water leading up to using the costume (make sure you go to the toilet before putting the costume on) and after being in the suit. Remember caffeine based and sugary drinks will make you more dehydrated.

Have frequent breaks to cool down. Do not stay in the costume for more than 15 minutes (less in hot weather) without a break.

Wear light, cotton clothes under the suit - T-shirt and shorts or light trousers.

A hair band is essential if the wearer has longish hair or a fringe that may fall forward and interfere with vision once the head is in place.

Have a plan with the Minder:

- know the story(s) being read
- have pre-arranged signals, especially if you need to leave unexpectedly (e.g. if you get too hot in the suit).
- involve parents as well as the children.

If a parent is dressing up as a Booksie, tell your child you are doing this but that it is a secret so the child does not think the Booksie has "eaten" the parent.

About Booksies

Booksies are mythical, imaginary creatures who live in the Blue Mountains. The male Booksie is called **Billy** and he has a younger sister called **Billie** (she has a pouch).

Booksies are naturally shy. They are only seen in public when they and their Minder are **carrying books**. They only appear in public to reinforce the message that **reading, rhymes and play** are amongst the most important and enjoyable aspects of every child's (and Booksie's) life!

Booksies feel more confident when there are children around who can coax them out with **special Booksie songs** and their favourite thing in the whole, wide world - **BOOKS!**

Booksies love to have stories read to them or rhymes sung to them and will listen and nod with great enthusiasm. However, Booksies are always aware of how big they are and their bright colour - especially around toddlers - so are always careful never to be too boisterous. They match their energy to the children around them - if the children are loud and enthusiastic, Booksies can get very excited; but if the children are a bit shy or overwhelmed by the Booksies size, then the Booksies quiet, gentle side comes out.

Booksies cannot speak. All of the Booksies communication comes from mime. So they can only appear when accompanied by a Minder or interpreter, who can understand the secret whispers and sign language and pass their thoughts on to the children present.

Sometimes it is **difficult for Booksies to see** all that is going on around them clearly, especially if there are lots of small children. The Booksie Minder will need to help Booksies negotiate situations where there may be uneven ground, stairs or be guided to a chair to sit on. Their downward vision is limited so they may not see small children, especially if they are close around the Booksies feet.

Holding books can be difficult for Booksie, so the Minder will need to turn the pages and lift the book so the pictures can be seen clearly by any children listening.



Billy Booksie



Billie Booksie

As Booksies have appeared at different community events, **children have discovered more about them:**

Often a visit by a Booksie has been preceded by sightings of mysterious blue **footprints**. Booksies' feet have three toes and are about the size of a grown man's. The footprints add to the excitement and children love to speculate about what kind of creature might have made them. On hard surfaces, the footprints are often marked by blue chalk; on carpet it's usually a mixture of talcum powder and blue glitter.

Booksies **sleep in a nest** made of leaves, twigs, blue fabric, wool or feathers. Sometimes children find the nest first, or maybe discover it after a Booksie visit. Sometimes, they like to be involved in building a nest in preparation for a Booksie visit. Booksies will only use new a nest if it is surrounded by storybooks that either Booksie or the children visited have been reading at bedtime.

Some children are fascinated by what Booksies might eat. They've discovered that Booksies **love to eat foods that start with "B"** - berries, beans, biscuits, broccoli, bananas, bread, Brussels sprouts, butter, baby spinach, etc. Children love to offer suggestions and extend the list. Booksies love to boil some billy tea when they are in the bush.

Booksies live in a **Booksie cave** - a special place with books, cushions and a reading chair.

Booksies' Special Song

Here are the words to one of the Booksies' favourite songs for children to sing to them:

FIND A BOOK

(to the tune of Jingle Bells)

VERSE:

We all gather 'round,
when a story's to be read.
See the books we've found
to read to us in bed.
We love pictures too,
the colours are so bright.
When stories are so great and new
we read them day and night.

CHORUS:

Find a book, take a look,
Read one ev'ry day.
Pictures, rhymes and stories too
We love them all, hooray!
Find a book, take a look,
Read one ev'ry day.
When someone reads to me and you,
We learn to read this way.

By Jean Nicholson, Grandma Reads

THE BOOKSIE JOURNAL

The Booksies have a Journal, which can be shared with your audience. You will find **blank Journal pages** in this folder.

The Journal also serves as our event record and feedback form, so please be sure to **add your event** to the Journal.

We love to have **photos** in the Journal. You are welcome to provide us with 1 - 3 but ONLY IF a parent or legal guardian has given consent to an image of their child being used. You will find **consent forms in this folder**.

Children and their parents/carers can find out more about what the Booksies have been doing and future events either on their Facebook Page at

www.facebook.com/PaintBlueREaD

or on the MOCS Webpage at:

www.mocs.org.au

