

Sensory story time

When Frank's teacher first told me about sensory story time at the Harford County Public Library, I imagined a room with stations where kids could put their hands in buckets of beads, or put sugar cubes on their tongues, or peek through a kaleidoscope, all while a lady read quietly in the background.

I did some research and learned that sensory story time is designed for kids with "sensory issues," which is frequently the case with autistic kids. We still don't know for sure what's at the core of Frank's behavioral and social issues, but he doesn't like the dark or loud sounds. He also refuses to sit still.

Sensory story time is a good option for Frank and other kids like him, because it doesn't require a child to sit still for an extended period of time while the facilitator reads two to three books. Sensory story time includes one book followed by a variety of short, simple activities. Children are encouraged to be active, and in some cases, singing and fingerplays are kept to a minimum.

The more I read, the more I knew that this would be a great opportunity for Frank to get out of the house and into a positive public experience. It would coincide with the developmental goal Frank's teacher and I set for him. So, on Valentine's Day, we headed to the Abingdon Branch of the Harford County Public Library to meet Leo's godmother, Brittany, for our first sensory story time experience.



Unfortunately, I wrote down the wrong time and we missed the actual story portion of the event! I was so embarrassed, but Mrs. Margaret and Mr. Jake, the librarians in charge of the event warmly welcomed us to a big, furniture free room where kids of all different levels of ability buzzed about, creating a "Love Monster" to match the book Love Monster by Rachel-Bright that the group had just finished reading. Mrs. Margaret and Mr. Jake handed us materials for all three boys and helped us find a spot on the floor.

Naturally, Frank was more interested in exploring than in working on his Love Monster, but Patrick had fun putting one together! After about five minutes, Mrs. Margaret and Mr. Jake brought out all kinds of simple puzzles and toys. Nothing was electronically powered and everything was safe enough for Leo to be around. Frank gravitated toward the two fruits, as he likes to carry a banana and an apple around the house.



When it was time to clean up, Mrs. Margaret and Mr. Jake very quietly sang a couple of simple songs. (I caught Frank singing them later). I felt so relieved. I'd spent half an hour in a public place with Frank without feeling exhausted and embarrassed. The librarians and other parents were so understanding. I never once felt as though someone was giving me a dirty look for being unable to behave. Frank was allowed to be the explorer he is. And what better place to explore than a library.

Sensory story time is held at the Abingdon Branch of the Harford County Library at 10:30 a.m. on the second Saturday of every month. Hope to see you there!

