

## **Lions, Buddies, and Books, Oh My!**

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It may not have felt much like the first day of spring last Wednesday, but two Ithaca City School District (ICSD) kindergarten classes got a warm welcome from youth librarians on their Kids Discover the Trail! (KDT!) field trip to the Tompkins County Public Library (TCPL) in downtown Ithaca. Peggy Weber of Caroline Elementary School and Sandy Rouleau of Northeast Elementary School brought their classes together to read books, learn about the library, and get to know each other.

After the two classes arrived on the same school bus, two youth librarians sang a song to the kindergarteners in the Storytime Room, which boasts a fantasy mural painted by a local artist. The children divided into two groups. One group, lead by youth librarians, went through the Alice-in-Wonderland-reminiscent door into the TCPL Youth Services Department. They went on a quest to find the Library Lion by following its multi-colored paw prints. On the way, they learned about a number of library services, including how to use the self-checkout, the reference desk, and the book-drop table.

Each student received their own copy of the book "Library Lion" to take home on behalf of KDT! due to the generosity of local businesses, foundations and individuals who contribute to KDT! through the Ithaca Public Education Initiative (IPEI).

Meanwhile, in the story-time room, children paired off with their "buddy" from the other class from the other elementary school. The pairs picked out library books to read, and gathered around teachers, parents and chaperones to read together.

After both groups participated in the two activities, they returned to the Storytime Room to hear Sarah O'Shea, TCPL Youth Services Librarian and KDT! Coordinator read three interactive stories, complete with accompanying puppet shows.

O'Shea, who has lead KDT! programming at TCPL since 2007, says the additional effort for these field trips is well worth it. "An important aspect of KDT! is helping the kids get to know each other through their elementary school years to help middle school be a little more comfortable for them."

The kindergarteners weren't the only ones with buddies from another school. Weber and Rouleau, friends for 20 years, have been pairing up their classes since KDT! began. The two have even taken the KDT! goal to an additional level arranging field trips for their kindergarteners to visit each other's classrooms. "The goal is that by the time they get to middle school, they understand that they all came from the same kind of place," said Rouleau. She added that seeing the kids "bond together as friends in the excitement of reading" was her favorite part of the day.

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