IMAGINE ESCAPE ROOMS AT YOUR LIBRARY!

ALBERTA LIBRARY CONFERENCE 2018

ALISON WATSON

OUTLINE

- What are the benefits of offering escape programs?
- Overview of St. Albert Public Library Escape Rooms (2017 & 2018)
- Activity: Try an escape room puzzle!
- How can *you* create and run a library escape program?
- Q & A

BENEFITS OF ESCAPE PROGRAMS & GAMES

THE GOOD AND THE BAD

Benefits

- High-demand programs
- Fun
- Attract new program attendees
- Big age range
- Brings together people from diverse backgrounds
- Fosters collaboration
- Practise skills

Drawbacks

- Creation is staff-intensive
- Running escape sessions is staff-intensive
- Small groups
- Program space challenges

Why do escape rooms?
-High-demand library programs because professional escape rooms are expensive (around $25 per person)
-Fun
-Way to attract first-time participants to library programs
-Can be done with a variety of age groups (tweens, teens, adults)
-Brings together people from diverse backgrounds
-Fosters collaboration (an important life skill) – working together to reach a common goal
-Practise problem-solving skills, logical and abstract thinking skills, communication skills

Drawbacks:
Staff intensive – both creating them and running them
Work best with 5 or 6 participants – everyone gets a chance to participate
A program space can be used only for the escape room for a period of time OR need extra staff time to set-up and clean up each day that you run the program

2017: ESCAPE ROOM 1 – THE PROFESSOR'S OFFICE

- 2 sessions in January (13 attended)
- Planned 10 more escape room sessions for Grades 5-7, Grades 5-12, Grades 8-12 & Adults (61 attended these sessions)
- Total attendance: 74

The premise: "You are a group of students who have heard that their paleontology professor has found a way to bring dinosaurs back to life. All he has to do is increase the rate of global warming, and heat up the Earth to a temperature at which dinosaurs can survive. You've snuck into his office while he is teaching a class and you have only 45 minutes to find his plans and get out. This should be a cinch, except you hear locks closing behind you, not only to your professor's office, but to the building as well. Hurry and find a way out before you become dino lunch!"

-This program was created through the collaborative efforts of two staff
-A photographer came to take pictures for a St. Albert Gazette article on escape rooms
Article URL: https://www.stalbertgazette.com/article/great-escape-a-look-at-the-regions-newest-entertainment-trend-20170311
(photo is from St. Albert Gazette article *Great Escape: A look at the region's newest entertainment trend* published on March 11 2017: Photographer Chris Colbourne, Article by Michelle Ferguson)
-More time to plan and carry out than anticipated, but the participants were very excited to try and escape
-Wanted to offer the program to a larger audience after putting in so much preparation
-We were able to block off a meeting room in the library and run the program over

2018: ESCAPE ROOM II – ANTARCTIC PERIL

- 12 sessions over spring break of 2018
- All sessions were for Grades 5-10
- Total attendance: 68

The Premise: Your research team has discovered a new species of penguin in Antarctica. A rival team wants to take credit for your discovery and they have locked you in the abandoned Danger Island Research Station which is poised precariously on an unstable ice shelf. The villainous team has taken all of the remote door openers except one. The caretaker has a spare remote door opener locked away for emergencies, but she often forgets the combination of the lock. Follow the series of clues and puzzles she has left to get into the final lock box. Your team has 45 minutes to solve all the puzzles and push the button before the ice shelf cracks and the research station and all of you are plunged into the icy ocean!
-Maximum of 6 participants per session
-Sessions were 94% full

PARTICIPANT COMMENTS

"It was really fun I want to do it next year!"

"Awesome. Was balanced in difficulty and was fun and hope you do more of these escape rooms."

"It was fun and everyone contributed."

"happy face thumbs up"

A sampling of comments from participant feedback forms
We also had many positive parent responses via email

TRY AN ESCAPE ROOM PUZZLE!

DIRECTIONS

- Presenter will help you split into groups
- DO NOT OPEN your envelope until instructed to do so
- You will have a time limit of 10 minutes
- Use the notepad paper and pencil to write your solution
- Send a representative from your group with the solution paper to attempt to open the lock box for your puzzle
- Reset the lock for the next group

-There are 3 different puzzles. I will go over all the puzzles and the solutions following the activity
-The type of lock you are attempting to open is shown on the envelope
-All locks will open easily with the right combination – do not force the lock
-Try the combination ONE time. If the lock doesn't open, reset it to all zeroes and return to your group for more problem solving
-Come up to try the lock again with your revised combination

-Time's up: clean up

THE MAP PUZZLE SOLUTION
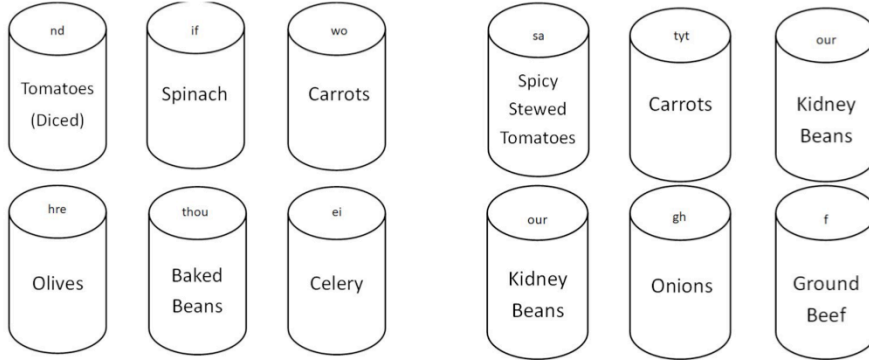
THE MAP PUZZLE SOLUTION

MAP OF ANTARCTICA

Coordinates of the numbers in order:
1. S, E
2. V, E
3. N, S
4. I, X
5. T, Y
6. F, I
7. V, E

seven sixty five =
765

THE RECIPE PUZZLE SOLUTION

nd	if	wo
Tomatoes (Diced)	Spinach	Carrots

sa	tyt	our
Spicy Stewed Tomatoes	Carrots	Kidney Beans

hre	thou	ei
Olives	Baked Beans	Celery

our	gh	f
Kidney Beans	Onions	Ground Beef

THE RECIPE PUZZLE SOLUTION

Good Old Chilli Recipe

2 Cans Beans

2 Cans Tomatoes

2 Cans Carrots

1 Can Chopped Celery

1 Can Ground Beef

1 Can Onions

Directions

Cook the beef until lightly browned. Add two cans of beans. Mix in two cans of tomatoes. Next add celery, then onions, then carrots. Bring to a boil and cook on low heat for an hour.

Following the recipe directions, put the cans of ingredients in order and use the letters on top of the lids.

Beef: F
Beans: OUR, THOU
Tomatoes: SA, ND
Celery: EI
Onions: GH
Carrots: TYT, WO

Four thousand eighty two = 4082

You'll have to shift some letter combinations around, because there are multiples of some ingredients where the cans have different sets of letters on the lid.

THE ICE CORE SAMPLE PUZZLE SOLUTION

Ice Core Samples from Locations near Danger Island Research Station

Keep at – 10° C

A = collected February 22, 2018   ● Site: Half Moon Island

B = collected March 1, 2018   ● Site: King George Island

C = collected March 8, 2018

D = collected March 15, 2018

(King George Island is the BEST PLACE to collect Ice Core Samples!)

The ice core samples are glue gun glue sticks marked with colored and black permanent markers

THE ICE CORE SAMPLE PUZZLE SOLUTION

Each sample has a number of black rings

Look at the Red ice core samples only

In alphabetical order: A has 2 rings, B has 4 rings, C has 7 rings, and D has 1 ring

= RED-2471

HOW CAN *YOU* CREATE AND RUN A LIBRARY ESCAPE PROGRAM?

OPTIONS:

- Make one from scratch
- Pre-made Escape Kits
- Games available at board game stores

MAKE A GAME FROM SCRATCH

We have done this. It is difficult and staff-intensive
We went to a professional escape room for inspiration
We had brainstorming sessions with two staff to generate ideas for puzzles

MAKE A GAME FROM SCRATCH

For the first escape room, I went to the craft store for wooden boxes and the hardware store for locks and supplies multiple times

Professional escape rooms can do things that are difficult to do in a library setting:

-Trap doors

-Moving walls

-Magnetic locks that open when objects are placed or moved in a certain sequence

The library did do a two-stage breakout - had to get out of a locked "office" into a larger "laboratory" area with new puzzles

Locked boxes and other things that lock:

Suitcases

Tool Boxes

Locking cabinet

Safe

TIPS

- Timing of the program: 60 minutes/ 45 minutes in the room
- Reinforce everything!
- Less is more
- Simply explain the premise and guidelines BEFORE entering the escape room
- Have a escape set-up sheet for facilitator with all puzzle solutions and combinations

-45 minutes - schedule and advertise it as a 60-minute program
-Laminate any posters, signs, instruction sheets
-Can use patterned duct tape to indicate that things do not need to be taken apart
-Use a countdown timer/ sync it with your watch
(participants discussed re-setting the iPad timer that we used)
-Simple, explain to group along with guidelines BEFORE going into the escape room (as soon as they go in the room, their focus shifts to what's in the room and trying to solve puzzles)

TRIAL RUN

Use staff or a group of volunteers (Teen advisory group?) who were not involved in creating the game to do a trial run and hopefully find any issues

A FAIRLY EASY PUZZLE
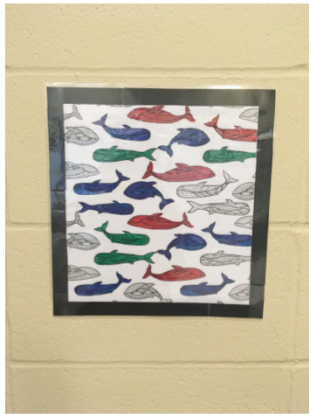
Mix of easy and more difficult puzzles is a good idea
Allows the team to experience success as well as challenges/ frustration
Props and puzzles
iPad with a VR app (HP Reveal)
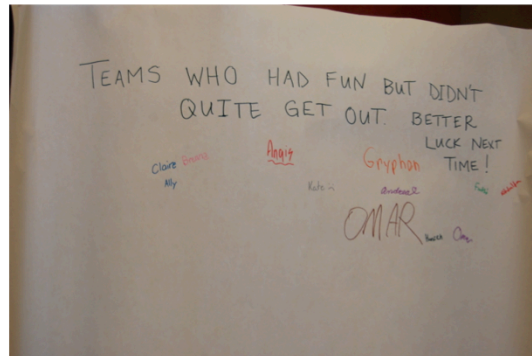Books on a topic related to the theme of the escape scenario
Recipes
Maps
Jigsaw puzzles
Invisible ink and UV flashlight
Easy Button from Staples

A WORD ABOUT HINTS

Why use hints?

-avoid frustration - allows them to continue after hitting a block

-can challenge participants to use one hint or no hints

-hints themselves can be challenging for the facilitator - Need some familiarity with the room and puzzles.

-In 2018 most groups used 2 hints, 1 group used 1 hint, no groups used zero hints

-hint cards are helpful - a token exchanged for a hint, and once they're gone, they're gone

-use a wireless doorbell to call the facilitator to get hints

Put a positive spin on everything
Emphasize successes
Take a sad photo followed by a "we had fun" photo to send to participants
Used We Escaped/ We Didn't Escape signs
Have a finishers wall for both successful and unsuccessful groups

PRE-MADE ESCAPE KITS

Includes 12 months of
Breakout EDU Platform Access

Breakout EDU

Market their product as "an immersive learning games platform"

The kits plus 12 months access to their platform of escape games is $150 USD plus shipping

We paid about $225 Canadian for ours in February

Also, for branch library systems, the company has kit bundles e.g. 6 kits, 6 access codes ($800 US plus shipping)

Has lots of useful components including

-2 lock boxes (larger one will accommodate a tablet)

-high-quality locks with expansion lock wheels: numbers, shapes, colors

-invisible ink pen plus decoder UV flashlight

-hint cards

-cards that prompt participants to reflect on their escape experience

Games on the platform are clearly explained with steps to set up and printable resources (that are shared with you on your cloud drive when you click "access resources" for a game)

Examples of games available: Totally Radical 80's Time Travel/ Back to Reality (a Minecraft themed game)/ lots of subject themed games for math, science, social studies

ESCAPE GAMES AVAILABLE AT BOARD GAME STORES

- EXIT the Game
- Unlock!
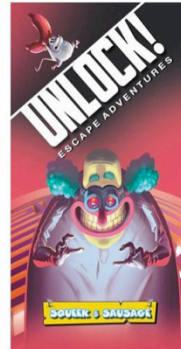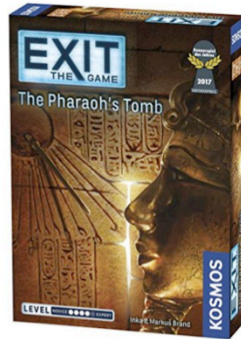
-About $20 Canadian for a game
-EXIT are one-use kits because the components are bent and torn as you progress through the game
-Unlock! Can be reused (with new groups) and requires a free app that runs on phones and tablets – works offline once app is downloaded
-Successfully used the Unlock! Game with a Teen Advisory Group (ages 13 to 18)
-Recommend searching online reviews for individual games to help determine difficulty level, content

Q & A

Contact Information:

Alison Watson

Teen Services Librarian, St. Albert Public Library

awatson@sapl.ca

780-418-6622