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THIRD ANNUAL ‘BACK TO SCHOOL NIGHT AT THE LIBRARY’ BRINGS LITERACY ALIVE ON ST. CROIX

ST. CROIX, USVI - Thirty-four families were treated to a night of literacy fun at the Third Annual Back to School Night at the Library on September 8 with the goal of increasing children’s literacy skills and providing parents with useful strategies to support their children.

The three-hour event was held at the Florence A. Williams Public Library in Christiansted, and targeted students in grades K-6 and their parents by offering a variety of activities and workshops based on students’ grade level.

Valrica Bryson, territorial director of the Department of Education’s Division of Virgin Islands Cultural Education, kicked off the fun-filled night with a storytelling game. She asked students to select 20 words and distribute them to audience members.

“In the words you selected there is the main character,” she said. “For this one, we will use Anansi because everyone is familiar with him.”

Each person was instructed to use his or her word to create a sentence for the story.

“It gives students an opportunity to create their own stories and still participate in the activity,” Bryson explained.

Following the activity, students separated into groups based on their grade level. Younger attendees enjoyed a comprehension-in-art activity with Program Assistant Denise Gomes. She read a story and engaged students in an arts-and-crafts activity based on the story.

Older students joined Nicole Samuel-Miller, Department of Education employee effectiveness system program manager, where they engaged in a writing assignment that explored alternative endings after watching a video clip.

Parents participated in a workshop on speaking and listening, facilitated by Dr. Carla Bastian, St. Croix District language arts coordinator and Jeselle Cruse-Peter, elementary programs coordinator. In the interactive workshop, parents were introduced to creative ways to help their children communicate effectively.

“I am guilty at times when I talk to my son,” Dr. Bastian said. “I would say, pass me that thing. Then, I would correct myself and say, ‘Pass me the phone charger, please’. By doing this, we are helping them communicate effectively.”

Parents also enjoyed a workshop on how to best promote and reinforce positive behavior in their children by PBIS coaches Erick Willie and Zuri Baker.

Other activities required children and parents to work together, such as the Make and Take Workshop. Parents aided their children in making origami, the Japanese art of folding paper. Families selected from several different origami projects and the excitement of the activity could be seen as they worked together to create the artwork.

Following other grade-level workshops, parents and students returned to the library’s main floor for a closing activity. The younger children showcased artwork they created throughout the course of the evening, while the older students read stories they wrote and performed a short skit.

Students received backpacks filled with books and other items promoting literacy as a parting gift.

Back to School Night at the Library is a partnership between the Department of Education and the Department of Planning and Natural Resources, Division of Libraries, Archives and Museums. It was established in 2016 to support the annual Governor’s Summer Reading Challenge, now in its 10th year. The Challenge encourages students in grades K-6 to read five or more books during the summer months and will conclude on September 21 this year.

Back to School Night at the Library will be held at the Charles W. Turnbull Regional Library in St. Thomas on September 15. Admission is free and open to children in grades K-6 and their parents.

For more information on the Governor’s Summer Reading Challenge, visit www.readfive.org.

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