

Top Tips

for Dancing in Libraries

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Top Tips for Dancing in Libraries

Reflecting back on our experience working with The Story Detectives in libraries from 2019-23, we have put together a list of **9 important things to bear in mind** if you are planning your own dance project for a library. There are a mixture of things here that apply to dance artists, to libraries, or to both.

1

Plan ahead

The more lead-in time the better, especially where funding needs to be secured. With most of our library partners for The Story Detectives, we were planning dates 9-12 months in advance.

Be prepared

2

Anticipate what needs to be in place for:

- getting library partners on board (e.g. production information sheet);
- planning the event (e.g. template letter of agreement and risk assessment);
- running the event (e.g. 'front of house' briefing note);
- and marketing the event (e.g. marketing pack, images, social media assets, poster and flyer artwork)

It was helpful for us, as the arts partner in each library, to think of ways we could minimise the impact on library staff time in taking on our event, where we knew that staffing was often already over-stretched.

However, it was also important to:

3

Invest in the collaboration, together

Know why you are working together on this. What are your shared ambitions for the project? What can you bring to each other? What do you need from each other to make it work?

Acknowledge and celebrate each other's role in making this happen – use each other's logos, link to each other's contact details and social media accounts for example.



4

Clear, friendly communication

It is very important to communicate clearly about the project with each other, but also with other members of your respective teams.

You don't have to be in contact all the time, but do try to keep each other up to date, especially about any changes.

Clear communication can help to anticipate and therefore manage any potential issues such as:

- other things that are supposed to be happening at the library on the day of the performance
- where are the study areas/places where 'regulars' like to sit – can you let people know as far in advance as possible if any of those areas may be impacted by the performance on the day?
- where will the performers be able to go on the day in between performances if needed? Check for any other external hirers using meeting rooms on those days.

Bring everyone along with you

5

If you are the key contact in a library, or someone overseeing the project across several libraries, make sure you advocate for the work across your team, letting everyone know what's happening and why it's brilliant!

We supplied 'front of house briefing sheets' to be circulated amongst library staff and volunteers in advance of the event to help with this. However, our collaboration was even more effective, and welcomed/valued across whole teams when there were opportunities in advance for everyone to hear about the project directly from us, and to ask questions (e.g. through group Zooms, site visits, and holding rehearsals on-site in advance of the performances).



What kind of work do you want to make? Will it work in the library context?

6

☀ Can you connect what you're doing to the world of the library? Will it feel 'at home' here?

Our audiences told us that they enjoyed The Story Detectives because it drew attention to the magic of stories, encouraged the children to ask questions and empowered them to be creative.

☀ Draw the audience in

For the majority of our audience for The Story Detectives from 2022-23, this was their first experience of something like what we were offering. Many had never seen a dance performance before, and there was also a smaller proportion who were completely new to the library.

This meant that for many of the audience, just being there (or deciding to stay if they were browsing the library when the performance started) was already a big deal. So given we were then demanding their attention for an hour we really focused on how we could invite them into that experience, make them feel welcome, and let them know that they could respond however they wanted. We found that if the work was delivered in a friendly, open way with a good dose of humour, it would bring everyone along with it.

☀ Be inclusive

This would be different for every piece of work, but for The Story Detectives, three things that were key to making it as inclusive as possible were:

- giving people information in advance about what to expect
- including references to lots of different starting points - all kinds of books, lots of changes of character, different styles of music for example
- leaving lots of space within the performance to adapt and respond to the feedback we were getting from the audience.

For the first time, we put in place a **Social Story Film** for the performances – a short film describing what people could expect from The Story Detectives, particularly aimed at children and young people with autism, but also appropriate for all those with social communication and social interaction challenges. We also had a printed version of this available in a designated 'Chill Out Space' in the library along with some sensory toys and we gave a very short talk before the performance that helped people understand what was about to happen, and the options they had to get involved.

☀ Make it flexible

Our production was very compact – we travelled as only 3 people on the road, played music via small battery powered speakers and used some props, but otherwise we didn't need any other kit. We worked within the libraries as they were, rather than bringing in a dance floor, or clearing a single 'performance space' and bringing in chairs. We took advantage of changing the position of bookcases where possible, to create 'tunnels' or 'towers', or moved smaller book boxes to the side, but that was always agreed in advance and put back when we were finished.

We understand it isn't appropriate to everyone's work to make it as site-adaptive as we did, but what was helpful was that we were flexible to a range of options and made the work scaleable for spaces of different sizes.

Spread the word

7

We used a range of different marketing approaches, but in general we built our audience through developing local word of mouth and a buzz around the project. For us, this included working with schools, sharing information via hyper-local forums such as Facebook groups, community blogs and in local press, and we also installed a **Story Detectives Activity Trail** in libraries 1 month in advance of our performances. This enabled us to reach more people and to engage them creatively in the piece and in designing their own stories, even before they saw the performance.

How can the project fit in with or add to what else is happening?

8

Connecting what you're doing with the [Libraries Connected Universal Library Offers](#) calendar and other local community events and festivals can be a great way of increasing local interest in the project.

We also found that our library partners were experts at finding ways of linking our Activity Trail, performances and workshops with special book displays and linked challenges and craft activities for example.



Continually learning

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We found out a lot by just trying things out, and we learned very quickly about what worked (and what didn't work)!

Surround yourself with brilliant people, ask for advice based on other people's experiences. Listen to what people (particularly your audiences) have to say, watch how they respond to your work and be ready to learn and adapt.

Links

There are many resources online that can help you plan your dance project for libraries e.g.

✳ [Creative Arts East's](#) Really Useful Guides for: [Artists Touring To Libraries](#) and [People Working in Libraries](#)

and

✳ [TAIL \(Touring Arts In Libraries\)](#) project's [10 Reasons to Programme Arts in Libraries](#)

✳ [Libraries Touring Cheat Sheet](#) and

✳ [Artists Touring in Libraries Cheat Sheet](#)