



IFLA Statement on Online Storytimes  
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**International  
Federation of  
Library  
Associations and Institutions**

# IFLA STATEMENT ON ONLINE STORYTIMES

## Introduction

Storytimes are a central pillar of many libraries' work to promote literacy, reading development, and engagement with young children and families in the communities they serve.

Traditionally, storytimes have taken place in a physical space where reading professionals interact with their audiences and users. However, the rise of digital technologies has created new possibilities to offer such services at a distance. With the COVID-19 pandemic, many libraries have become dependent on online offers in order to continue to fulfill their missions.

However, libraries have not always had clear guidelines about their ability to organise storytimes without needing to seek permission or pay remuneration to rightholders<sup>1</sup>. This uncertainty has deepened with the move to digital channels.

In this context, IFLA considers that libraries should not face any unnecessary legal barriers or doubt in the delivery of storytimes, through digital media or otherwise, when such storytimes are presented on a non-profit basis.

In the particular context of the pandemic, storytimes delivered by library professionals and volunteers help ensure that children and other library users can continue to access quality content and skills development, contributing to their personal, academic and professional futures.

## Why are storytimes essential to literacy development?

Learning to read is a key step in the personal and academic development of children. Maintaining and enhancing literacy skills is also essential for the development of informed and participatory societies, contributing to a wider range of policy outcomes.

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<sup>1</sup> Note in particular the efforts of a French collecting society to compel libraries to pay to carry out storytimes, ultimately abandoned in the face of strong opposition, including from authors: Actualité, *La SCELf renonce à toute forme de perceptions sur les lectures à voix haute*, 27 June 2018, <https://actualite.com/article/18496/bibliotheque/la-scelf-renonce-a-toute-forme-de-perceptions-sur-les-lectures-a-voix-haute>, consulted 15 December 2021



Storytimes are therefore a crucial part of reading and literacy programmes in libraries and beyond, supporting language development, vocabulary acquisition and knowledge of the alphabet and other basic language forms<sup>234</sup>, but also to lifelong learning and patrons' engagement with and support for libraries. The objective of storytimes is to develop a love of reading, a desire to learn to read, and to make full use of the varied collections of libraries. Storytimes that are facilitated by human readers engage children to give substance, expression, and emotion to reading, thereby supporting social emotional learning.

Storytimes are a critical tool that supports parents' efforts to both prepare their children for school<sup>5</sup> and complement formal instruction<sup>67</sup>. Beyond formal learning, storytimes are a valuable informal learning moment for families as part of libraries' wider mission to serve all members of the community, including newcomers and others who have a different mother tongue.

Allowing storytimes to take place online is simply a continuation of the mission of libraries in a digital environment, opening up possibilities not just to serve existing users in times of lockdown, but also to reach previously under-served groups. For example, families who are unable to travel to library buildings or who are unable to bring their children at specific time slots can benefit in particular from an online storytime program. Families that include children with disabilities can also have enormous benefits from online storytimes.

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<sup>2</sup> Irwin, Julia, Moore, Dina, Tornatore, Lauren and Fowler, Annie (2012), *Promoting Emerging Language and Literacy During Storytime*, Children and Libraries 2012 Summer-Fall 10(20): <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3953558/>, consulted 15 December 2021

<sup>3</sup> Ewart, Gestny and de Rocquigny, Janelle (2013), L'impact des programmes de litt rati e pr scolaire offerts dans les communaut s franco-manitobaines en contexte linguistique minoritaire, Francophones d'Am rique, Issue 32, Autumn 2011, <https://www.erudit.org/en/journals/fa/2011-n32-fa0436/1014044ar/>, consulted 15 December 2021

<sup>4</sup> ALA (2021), Early Literacy: What We know About Early Literacy, [https://www.ala.org/united/products\\_services/booksforbabies/earlyliteracy](https://www.ala.org/united/products_services/booksforbabies/earlyliteracy), consulted 15 December 2021

<sup>5</sup> MacLean, Judy (2008), Library Preschool storytimes: Developing early literacy skills in children, ADTED 458, Summer 2008: [https://old.ed.psu.edu/goodlinginstitute/pdf/fam\\_lit\\_cert\\_stud\\_work/Judy%20MacLean%20Library%20Preschool%20Storytimes.pdf](https://old.ed.psu.edu/goodlinginstitute/pdf/fam_lit_cert_stud_work/Judy%20MacLean%20Library%20Preschool%20Storytimes.pdf), consulted 15 December 2021

<sup>6</sup> A British study has shown that reading out-loud had positive impacts on children as it supports better level of understanding and ability to focus: Vincent, Clara (2020), Une  tude pr conise de consacrer plus de temps de lecture   voix haute en classe, Actualitt , 28 February 2020, <https://actualitte.com/article/8796/scolaire/une-etude-preconise-de-consacrer-plus-de-temps-de-lecture-a-voix-haute-en-classe>, consulted 15 December 2021

<sup>7</sup> Campana, K. & Mills, J. Elizabeth & Capps, Janet & Dresang, E.T. & Carlyle, A. & Metoyer, C.A. & Bayo, Ivette & Feldman, Erika & Brouwer, M. & Burnett, Kathleen & Kotrla, B.. (2016). Early literacy in library storytimes: A study of measures of effectiveness. 86. 369-388, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/309263211\\_Early\\_literacy\\_in\\_library\\_storytimes\\_A\\_study\\_of\\_measures\\_of\\_effectiveness](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/309263211_Early_literacy_in_library_storytimes_A_study_of_measures_of_effectiveness), consulted 15 December 2021



During the pandemic, libraries in many countries have organised such online storytimes for the benefit of communities<sup>8910</sup>.

In some countries, this has proceeded on the basis of agreements with publishers, although these have rarely covered all books, and different terms and conditions have applied<sup>11</sup>. In others, it has been suggested that libraries can rely directly on the law<sup>12</sup>.

## **Recommendations**

In order to fulfill their mission to support literacy and reading development, libraries therefore need to benefit from an adequate legal framework to provide storytimes on a non-profit basis, offline and online.

As such, IFLA recommends that governments should:

- Ensure that library storytimes, both in person and online, either do not count as a restricted use under copyright law, or are covered by an unremunerated exception.
- Clarify that there should be no hindrance to the steps needed to make storytimes accessible to persons who would not otherwise be able to enjoy them fully.
- Provide guidance to this effect, providing libraries with certainty in carrying out storytimes online for the benefit of their users.

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<sup>8</sup> State Library, New South Wales (2021), Storytime Online, <https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/learning/kids-and-families/storytime-online>, consulted 15 December 2021

<sup>9</sup> New York Public Library (2021), Online Storytime at The New York Public Library: <https://www.nypl.org/remote-learning-resources/storytime>, consulted 15 December 2021

<sup>10</sup> New York Public Library (2021), Storytime Online, Waukeg Public Library: <https://www.nypl.org/remote-learning-resources/storytime>, consulted 15 December 2021

<sup>11</sup> For example, the Library and Information Association of New Zealand-te Aotearoa joined the Coalition for Books, providing permissions for storytimes for books from participating publishers: <https://www.librariesaotearoa.org.nz/korero-blog/virtual-storytimes-aotearoa-during-covid-19?fbclid=IwAR2efGF8OPorposIqFmafeLwNYqqM8fn1ldAe6Ig45SAJ5-N365ikHbmevo>. In Australia, there has subsequently been an agreement to enable storytimes to be recorded and made available online, although in return for remuneration: <https://www.alia.org.au/Web/About-Us/Online-Storytime-Agreement.aspx>

<sup>12</sup> The Canadian Federation of Library Associations recommended that storytimes could take place under an existing fair dealing exception: [http://cfla-fcab.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/CFLA-FCAB\\_online\\_storytimes\\_copyright\\_guidelines\\_for\\_cdn\\_libraries-1.pdf](http://cfla-fcab.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/CFLA-FCAB_online_storytimes_copyright_guidelines_for_cdn_libraries-1.pdf), as has guidance in the US: <https://programminglibrarian.org/articles/online-story-time-coronavirus-it%E2%80%99s-fair-use-folks>



- Ensure that retention periods for recordings should not be unduly limited, in order to allow libraries to provide access to storytimes in a way that meets the needs of users and in particular the needs of children and their families.
- Not impose obligations of compensation or additional payments.

Libraries and Library Associations in turn should:

- Engage with governments to obtain the clarifications set out above.
- Recognise the author, illustrator and publisher at the time of presentation of the work (or in any accompanying text), unless the information is not available. Furthermore, it is good practice to display the cover and back cover of the book to enable the promotion of the book to broader audiences.
- Consider a limited or controlled distribution of storytime recordings to library users to minimize unreasonable harm to markets.