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Bilingual Story Time at Tulsa Library

Por Whitney Ortega

Every Wednesday at 10 o'clock in the morning you can find children listening attentively to a story read in two languages, Spanish and English, at the Kendall-Whittier Library.

Bilingual Story Time is a program sponsored by Tulsa's public library and it's held at both the Kendall-Whittier and Martin Regional libraries. The program has been running for more than 15 years and was started as a way to improve services to Spanish-speaking families in Tulsa. "I think it is important to know two languages. The world today is global there isn't just one language. Now we need to know many," said Kirsten Etheridge of the Kendall-Whittier Library. "The children are of the age when they can understand and learn both languages, besides that [the program] is fun for them." Children don't just listen to stories they also sing songs and learn new vocabulary in Spanish.

The children's participation is more than just fun for them. "The motivation for the children to participate during story time is very important because it helps them remember the story. When they wish to express themselves in Spanish it will be easier for them to remember the words," said Etheridge. The program is offered free of charge year round.

Children from schools nearby Kendall-Whittier Library often walk over to listen to the stories. This habit is helping them establish an interest in reading that will benefit them in the future. "Wednesday's they know it's library day. They love coming to the library. They just love books," says Cheryl Wadley a teaching assistant. "A lot of our students will go straight to the Spanish books when we walk in. In life they are going to be bilingual which will set them up to go further." Children aren't the only ones who learn at Bilingual Story Time.

The program is also a lesson for parents. "One of the goals is to model reading for parents. Sometimes parents are shy about reading to their kids and by bringing them to story time, they can get ideas on how to read stories and engage with their kids over books," said Sara Martinez Coordinator of the Martin Regional Library. "It also gives us an opportunity to emphasize the importance of retaining the Spanish language in the family. Immigrant families are very focused on learning English as an overriding goal and we want to encourage them to support bilingualism in their kids." Bilingual Story Time is scheduled at Kendall-Whittier Library every Wednesday at 10 a.m. at Martin Regional Library on Wednesday's at 6:30 p.m. and on Thursday's at 10 a.m.

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