

Dinosaur Candy Land: A World of Sweet Prehistoric Adventure at Liverpool Public Library

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The Transformation ...
The Journey ... The Tasks ...
The Return ...

It all started with the lollipops. Director Jean Polly had acquired three gigantic, luscious-looking (though cardboard) lollipops, with the thought of having a life-sized Candy Land game at the library. Add to that the fact that we had recently been given a legacy which funded a family of life-sized protoceratops dinosaur statues, Mari, Dhari, and ZuZu, who now reside on the side lawn of the library. Somehow a combination of the two concepts seemed possible.

To design the event, I turned to Scott Nicholson, Associate Professor at SU and gamification expert. Scott came up with a script and several ideas for appealing parts of the game. He suggested that kids participate as teams, and start with a collaborative

activity. This idea became the Chocolate Tar Pit crossing activity.

The event started with face painting, with each child having the chance to decide which type of dinosaur they wanted to be. While waiting to have their faces painted, they also made a simple dinosaur tail (a crafty recycling from our dinosaur event the previous year).

The action continued on the side lawn. Children went out the side door where a chalked path on the sidewalk directed them to a tunnel (2 appliance boxes with holes cut in the bottoms and nested). When they crawled through, voila! They had gone back 66 million years into **Dinosaur Candy Land**.

Our community relations/publicity department created five impressive 5-foot cardboard/clipart dinosaur cutouts, as well as a Lollipop Mountain range. The narrative was that players were on a quest to save the dinosaur eggs. They had to get through the Chocolate Tar Pit, nurture some baby pterosaurs in the Lollipop Mountains, and discover the eggs in the

Prehistoric Peppermint Flibber Forest. They received appropriate candy treats for each of these tasks. The eggs (small beach balls) were rescued and placed in a nest near Dhari, Mari and ZuZu.

Teen volunteers as well as two volunteers from SU helped things stay on track and keep moving. Around 125 five to ten-year-olds and sixty adults went on the quest, collaborated to get their friends over the chocolate tar pit, helped the baby pteranodons learn to fly, saved the dinosaur eggs, and learned how to make flibbers (expandable newspaper trees). All in all, it was a successful quest.

This program was essentially a craft program, like many we do at the library. But presenting it as a story or role-playing game made it more compelling for all the participants. The first task, a collaborative game, was another wrinkle. While we sometimes base programs on popular series or characters (Dork Diaries was our most recent) this was our first try at having a narrative arc for a program.