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Infant lapsit story time - You can do it too!

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Well, I don't know how well or how poorly my own stories illuminate anyone else's landscape, but I sure as spit hope to illuminate some of my own. Because I know that if I can just capture one small glint off that diamond it will give me a life within my story. And if I have a life within my story, so might a reader. Our shared experience could even glow, and linger, and help us understand a little more about the lives we live.

I wrote *Blue Skin of the Sea* because for most of my life I was, perhaps only in my own mind, a nobody. And, like everyone everywhere, I wanted to be somebody, to feel wanted, to feel important. Sonny Mendoza is somebody. He has a good father and a strong extended family. He struggles, but he does so with a heart. He's challenged, but manages to make decent life choices. He is the boy I should have been. One of the reasons I wrote that book

was to feel what that was like. It felt pretty good.

Under the Blood-Red Sun came about through curiosity. My own future father was at Pearl Harbor the day it was bombed. My uncle was at the beach on the other side of the island and saw a plane blow a boat out of the water. He thought it was target practice. It wasn't.

What were those days like? What did people feel? Were they curious? Stunned? Terrified? I wanted to know.

But more than that, I wrote *Under the Blood-Red Sun* because I wanted to examine the small but powerful things that build friendship and loyalty. As I struggled with that manuscript, I called back the memory of a moment that hit me in young adulthood, a moment of being over-

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Infant Lapsit Story Time— You Can Do It Too!

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Holding a regular story time for children younger than two seemed like an overwhelming task. However, after observing Curtis Kiefer's program at the Corvallis-Benton County Public Library, we realized we had made an easy, fun-to-present program more difficult than it had to be. Anyone with an interest in babies and books can do it!

Our program is scheduled on the same morning every week to make it easy for parents to remember. We gear the lapsit for children up to 24 months, but don't keep out older siblings who come along for the fun. Each program lasts from 20 to 30 minutes, but some parents remain in the story room to network with other parents. (According to many of the moms and dads, this is one of the program's biggest benefits.)

Each week we choose four to six very simple stories (or longer stories the teller can adapt easily). The pictures must be easily "read" by very young children. We have found that stories that require participation—like making animal sounds—work best. Stories that work well can be used again and again, because the babies enjoy hearing their favorites retold.

Music is an essential part of infant lapsit story time. At the beginning of story time and between each book, we sing or perform a large motor activity. We have recorded the songs we use each week to help parents and babies learn the songs and motions. We also add one or two other songs or activities during each lapsit to add variety and broaden the babies and parents repertoire. A stuffed gorilla stands in as the storyteller's "baby," which allows us to model the motions parents can do with their babies during each song or activity. Our gorilla tends to wander from infant to infant during the stories, but he manages to return to us for the musical portions of the program.

We use two storytellers for infant lapsit story time, alternating every other week, because we fought over who was going to be the lucky one to do the program. The rotation keeps us fresh and enthusiastic, allows the parents and the babies to become familiar with two different faces and styles of presentation, and makes our vacation days less painful to the babies because they are still seeing someone they know lead the program.

We started in January with a group of about eight parents and their babies. Word of mouth rapidly created a bigger audience, which has now grown to more than 70 parents, grandparents, sitters, and babies. We let the parents know it is okay to let the babies wander around the room during the program. We don't expect strict attention during the stories because we know we are sharing our enthusiasm for reading. Invariably some story time books are picked up by babies as we read, but we always manage to get them back to share with the group. A basket of board books that circulate are brought to into the story room each week, and we encourage parents to look at them and check out their favorites to share at home.

Infant lapsit is more enjoyable and easier to present than other programs we have put on. If you haven't tried it yet, think about putting an infant lapsit into your regular programming schedule. The rewards are tremendous. ☺