Libraries & Lizards: Playing D&D at Public Libraries Program Framework
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Description:

      Dungeons & Dragons, colloquially referred to as D&D, is a tabletop role playing game in which players take on the roles of adventurers and go on epic quests facilitated by a non-player Dungeon Master (DM), who acts partly as a narrator and partly as a referee. The game is part improvisation, part storytelling, and part dice rolling, with twenty sided dies determining the degrees of success of a player's action and other types of dice having other roles. The game is increasing in popularity, but finding a game to play can be difficult, especially for young players who don't know where to start. The library, as a familiar and safe space with resources, can help teach young adults about this hobby and provide a space to play.

      This adaptable program provides a framework for public libraries to run a D&D game for young adult users at a public library (or school libraries) using the *Curse of Strahd* campaign guide. This can be a one-off game, known as a one-shot, or a multi-session campaign adventure, and can be run virtually or in-person. Attendees will be able to create characters, learn the rules of the game, and help craft an epic adventure for themselves and other players at the table.   This resource has a schedule for an introductory and character creation session, as well as a framework for gameplay sessions. There are ways to run this program virtually as well.

      This program was developed specifically for a group of 3-5 players ages 15 to 18. It was designed to be run by 1 library staff member but could be altered to account for up to 6 players and multiple player groups run by multiple staff members. At least one staff member or librarian can act as DM for the game for every 3-5 young adults. Familiarity with D&D is an asset for staff interested in running this program.

Objectives:

This program supports the following *40 Developmental Assets for Adolescents* from the Search Institute (1997):

	No.	Asset	Rationale
External	3	Other Adult Relationships	Young adults will have the opportunity to interact with library staff in both informal and game play settings and form relationships.
	10	Safety	This program allows young adults to try out a new hobby in a safe and supervised environment. Young adults will develop new skills and interact with each other under the supervision of library staff, who will make sure that the participants are physically and emotionally comfortable and safe during the sessions.
	15	Positive Peer Influence	The program allows participants to find and play alongside like-minded young adults with similar interests, and could lead to lasting friendships.
	17	Creative Activities	This program combines narrative storytelling, acting, and gameplay into an interactive and creative experience.

	18	Youth Programs	This program is designed to be recurring, either by the same group of young adults or by several groups of young adults all in their own games.
	25	Reading for Pleasure	Participants will be able to read and peruse game related books and resources. The library may also choose to create a display of fantasy books and resources that could be of interest for players to check out from the library.
Internal	30	Responsibility	Young adults will see the consequences of their actions in the game and take responsibility for their actions and their character's actions in a safe and contained space.
	32	Planning and Decision Making	Young adults will navigate the social and strategic world of the game and collaborate with each other to plan and make decisions that impact the characters and their story.
	33	Interpersonal Competence	Gameplay and roleplaying within the sessions will develop social awareness, communication skills, conflict resolution, and relationship building. Young adults will cooperate and talk with each other to navigate the world and situations in the game, resolve conflicts, and respect each other's opinions, ideas, and space.
	36	Peaceful Conflict Resolution	Young adults will learn to work with each other to resolve conflicts both in the game and out of the game. They will learn to determine which game encounters can be resolved peacefully and what kinds of situations they need to tackle in different ways.
	37	Personal Power	Game play through their characters will give young adults a sense of control and power within the world of the game, giving them a sense of confidence that will hopefully translate to the real world.
	38	Self-Esteem	Success, confidence, and fun will ideally build the self-esteem of young adult participants.

Materials & Equipment:
This program requires the following materials and equipment:

Program Materials	• Copy of *The Curse of Strahd* Campaign Guide by Wizards of the Coast • Copy of the *Monster Manual* by Wizards • Copy of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* by Wizards • *D&D Starter Set* by Wizards (optional) • Players Handbook (at least two copies on the table) • DM Screen (or some way of hiding DM material from players)

	• D&D Character Sheets (https://dnd.wizards.com/charactersheets) • Pencils, erasers, and scrap paper • Notebooks (1 per participant, optional) • Dice sets (physical or digital) • Snacks and water bottles (accessed at the break) • D&D Beyond (free digital toolset with books, interfaces, and resources for both players and DMs—optional, but recommended if running a virtual program; more info under Budget)
Library Materials	• iPads or tablets (optional, recommended if using D&D Beyond) • Fantasy books and/or books • Books about role playing games, creative writing, etc. • Display cases for fantasy or speculative fiction books • Library card registration forms
Equipment	• Table and chairs • Printer (if using paper copies)
Tools for Remote Program	• Computer and internet access • Discord, Roll20, and/or another video conferencing software • Subscription to D&D Beyond and/or digital copies of character sheets, etc. (downloadable on Wizards of the Coast)

The campaign guide, adventure guide, and handbooks listed above contain all the relevant information, stories, and instructions for library staff to run the game. *Curse of Strahd* is highly recommended to D&D beginners and is thus the perfect starting point for a D&D program. Staff acting as DM should do their best to review the materials and instructions well before program's start date to best facilitate character creation and gameplay. The official D&D website has a ton of free resources for staff to get familiar with the game and its rules.

Program Timetable (suggested):
Below is a possible framework for the first two sessions of the program, with the second session acting as a template for subsequent sessions of a campaign program. This program is designed to run weekly or monthly, ideally on a weekend, and is adaptable for one-shots or shorter campaigns.

Session 1: Introduction to D&D and Character Creation

Duration: 4-5 hours	Activity	Explanation	Materials
5 min	Welcome	At the start time, welcome the participants to the program. Explain the schedule for the night: introductions, character creation, break for snacks/bathroom, how to play D&D instruction, and closing. Remind them that this first session will be focused on creating characters and getting familiar with the game.	N/A
10 min	Introductions	Introduce yourself and explain that you'll be the Dungeon Master for the game. Allow participants to introduce themselves to each other, explain why	N/A

		they want to try D&D, and what kind of character they want to play if they know. Try a few icebreakers if you have time.	
1.5- 2 hrs	Character Creation Time!	Pass out character sheets and pencils and show them the Player's Handbook. Walk them through the character creation process outlined there, using the standard values for their character sheet. Explain the different types of classes, abilities, and help them to fill in their characters. Encourage them to talk about backstories and personalities for their characters! Use this opportunity to take note of what kind of characters you'll be dealing with in the coming weeks.	-Character sheets (printed or digital) -Pencils and paper -Copies of *Player's Handbook*
15-30 min	Break	Explain that there will be a break for participants to go to the bathroom, grab some water, or have a snack. Encourage them to explore the library resources and tell them that you will start the next portion of the program in 30 minutes. Staff can use the break to make photocopies of character sheets in case a participant leaves it behind next time you play. If all the participants come back before the break ends and want to continue, you can start earlier.	-Snacks -Water bottles -Library resources (related books and movies)
1.5-2 hrs	Intro to D&D!	Use this time to explain the rules of D&D. Show the participants the types of dice, how combat works, and general etiquette rules for the table; no talking over each other, no foul language, be respectful to you and others, etc. Run them through a no-consequences combat encounter so they can get a feel for how the game works! Select a random monster of CR 1 and see how they do. Remind them that this has no bearing on the real game and is just for practice.	-Dice -*Player's Handbook* for reference -Battle map (optional) -*Dungeon Master's Guide* (staff only) -*Monster Manual* (staff only) -DM Screen

Duration	Activity	Explanation	Materials
10 min	Closing	Thank participants for coming to this first session and that you hope they will return for more! Encourage them to return their pens and pencils and to take their character sheets and notebooks home for next session. Remind them that they are welcome to browse the library resources before they go and check out anything that catches their eye.	-Library resources (collection, marketing materials, library card forms)

Session 2 and on: Time to Play D&D!

Duration: 4-5 hours	Activity	Explanation	Materials
5 min	Welcome	At the start time, welcome the participants to the program. Explain that the night will be mostly game play, with a break halfway through the session to go to the bathroom, get water, or eat some snacks. Review player etiquette one more time to remind them of proper behaviour at the table but remind them that is supposed to be fun!	N/A
5 min	Introductions	Go around the table and introduce yourselves. "Hi, my name is _____, and I'll be your Dungeon Master for this session!" Encourage them to introduce themselves and their characters. For example, "Hi, my name is Kate, and I'll be playing Chance, the half-elf bard." Use this time to remind them where the *Player's Handbook* is, hand out pencils, and remind them to take out their character sheets and notebooks (notebooks optional).	-Photocopies of filled in character sheets if necessary
1.5 – 2 hrs	Game	Begin the game! Keep the *Player's Handbook* on the table for players to reference. Embrace the chaos but remind them to be respectful of you and each other as they play. Start the session with a narrative introduction to the campaign, as provided in *Curse of Strahd.* It's also a good idea to begin all subsequent sessions by refreshing players on where they last ended the story.	*-Player's Handbook* *-Dungeon Master's Guide, Curse of Strahd, and Monster Manual* (staff only) -DM Screen

15-30 min	Break	Explain that there will be a break for participants to go to the bathroom, grab some water, or have a snack. Encourage them to explore the library resources and tell them that you will start the next portion of the program in 30 minutes. If all the participants come back before then and want to continue, you can start earlier.	-Snacks -Water bottles -Library resources (related books and movies)
1.5 – 2 hrs	More Game	Continue the game!	
10-30 min	Closing	End the game on a narratively appropriate point or a cliff hanger if needed. If the characters level up, spend some time helping them to select new abilities and stats; this is all explained in the *Player's Handbook*. Thank participants for coming to this session and that you hope they will return for more! Encourage them to return their pens and pencils and to take their character sheets and notebooks home for next session. Remind them that they are welcome to browse the library resources before they go and check out anything that catches their eye.	-Library resources (collection, marketing materials, library card forms)

Note: for a one-shot program, use the template for session 2. The *D&D Starter Set* comes with 5 prewritten characters that will save some time, or you can prewrite characters for your players. Wizards of the Coast also has some prewritten characters on the D&D Website.

Publicity:

	Proposed method
Inside the library	• Posters • Handouts • Conversations (word of mouth)
Outside the library	• Flyers and/or posters in game shops or game cafés • Contact local school librarians to distribute flyers and put up posters
Website/Social Media	• Post on library website • Email in library newsletter • Instagram • TikTok

Estimated Budget:
Based on approximated prices from Wizards of the Coast, Indigo, Staples, and Amazon as of March 2021.

Material	Price
Curse of Strahd Campaign Guide	60 CAD

D&D Starter Set	23 CAD (optional, see below)
Dungeon Masters Guide	60 CAD
Monster Manual	60 CAD
Player's Handbook (1-2)	60-120 CAD (60 CAD each)
DM Screen	20 CAD (optional)
Dice sets (3-5 to share)	20 CAD
Printer paper for Character sheets	7 CAD
Notebooks (3-6)	21-60 CAD (7-10 CAD each)
Erasers (4 pack)	3 CAD
Pencils (10 pack)	1 CAD
Snacks (water, tea, chips, pop, etc.)*	30 CAD
Starter Set Program Price**	**$84 CAD**
Min Price	**$302 CAD**
Max Price	**$442 CAD**

*snacks would be a weekly/monthly cost.

I understand that this seems like a hefty price for a program. However, keep in mind that this session is designed to run multiple times over the course of months or even years. Depending on how long the campaign runs and depending on the scheduling if you choose to run the program weekly or monthly, or for multiple groups of participants on different days, the proposed budget, excluding snacks, is ideally a one-time cost. Using the D&D Beyond Master Level Subscription (optional, recommended for remote programs) (36 CAD/6 months, 70 CAD/annually) can potentially reduce costs by allowing library staff to access and share all copies of books they purchase with their players. Individual books are an additional 37 CAD each on top of the subscription, but only need to be purchased once to share.
**Optionally, you may also substitute the *D&D Starter Set* for the *Curse of Strand*, *Player's Handbooks* *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and *Monster Manual*. The *Starter Set* includes a prewritten Adventure Book with the rules and outlines to run your campaign, rules for players, and 5 prewritten characters. It's a lot cheaper, though reduces customization and flexibility slightly. Your library can also investigate partnering with local game shops or game cafés to supply books and game resources for publicity and other benefits.

Evaluation
Because this is such a social program, evaluation would be a bit more informal. Check in with your players to ensure that they are having fun, especially after emotional or stressful encounters in game. Debrief with your players after every session to see what they enjoyed, what they didn't, and how you can make the experience better for them.

References

D&D Beyond. (2021). *D&D Beyond - An official digital toolset for Dungeons & Dragons (D&D) Fifth Edition (5e).* D&D Beyond. https://www.dndbeyond.com/

Search Institute. (1997). *The developmental assets framework.* https://www.search-institute.org/our-research/development-assets/developmental-assets-framework/

Wizards of the Coast. (2021). *D&D official homepage.* Dungeons & Dragons. https://dnd.wizards.com/