

Join Irene Smalls and Literacise

Storyteller and author [Irene Smalls](#), who is the author of 15 children's books and 3 interactive storytelling CDs, believes kids should be active readers and she's taken that to a whole new level with a grant-funded program that has the Boston area jumping. Now she's taking her innovative Literacise reading/exercise program, www.literacise.com, to a national audience. Her picture books including Jonathan and His Mommy, Kevin & His Dad and My Nana and Me have been used in her school and storytelling programs to get kids up on their feet to interact with what happens in the story, and now she has formalized the idea and gained community-wide involvement.

How did she build this into a program that now includes the Story Steps Exhibit at Boston Public Library, college students designing Literacise Fashion workout clothes and a Literacise Film Festival, which includes a series of films (all with reading lists) that show kids skateboarding, double dutching and skiing? Further, are there ways of getting grant funding for projects you may conceive? Here's what Irene's said about getting Literacise off the ground.

1. Why did you think this might qualify for a grant?

The Literacise concept combines many things that are at the top of the popular discourse: literacy, health, using science to increase achievement and childhood obesity. A lot of it is out of the book thinking. A book is no longer just a book anymore.

2. Which organizations did you pursue in your community -and what would you suggest to authors/illustrators who might want to try to get grant money?

I asked libraries, fitness organizations and eventually a community minded bank. I would suggest author/illustrators look at community stakeholders in their concept to find likely funders.

3. What did you learn about writing a good grant proposal?

A lot of it is luck. I didn't write a proposal. Finding the right person at the right time. I kept asking and getting "no, no, no, no" until someone paused and said, "that is good idea".

4. How do you see this in terms of branding your books and fitting in with your career?

My career has always been as a storyteller/author. Active reading has been part of my MO since I started. Literacise is a natural extension of active reading. This is a great question because in today's market author/illustrators have to think about their brand. Books are just part of their brand.

5. What can people do if they want to start a Literacise program in their community?

They can contact me through my website, www.irenesmalls.com. I have a wealth of research, documentation and how to information that I can share.

6. Why is the Literacise concept important?

The Literacise concept is important because as responsible parents, artists, educators, etc. we have to address the needs of the whole child. Our goals should be long term. Not, just buy and read my book today. But wanting children to stay healthy and to love reading so they can buy

our books over a longer period of time. Also, we've got some fierce competition for kid's attention these days and their reading engagement and enjoyment is vital to continuing our careers. If kids stop reading, bye bye author, bye bye illustrator. That's why it's critical that we find new ways to engage.

Irene has said that "as an author she's looked to use science to help create materials not just books that really enhance a child's academic and personal life. "Science tells us kids want to have fun," she says. I see my job with "Literacise" as providing a new way for them to have fun while connecting with books and learning in a whole new way. I'm thrilled with how this has taken off. In fact, now we're serving as a model for others. A formal study of the Literacise concept is scheduled for this year at the Nathan Hale School in Roxbury, Massachusetts, and the program is expanding nationally. Now, I hope it can serve as an inspiration to authors and illustrators. 10:11/09