The Problem - Making it Easy to Read with Children

TinyTales is a reading application that allows authors and illustrators to upload their books to the database for subscribers to read with their children. TinyTales found their subscribers were having a mutual grievance with the time-consuming nature of the app when it came to selecting the perfect stories for their children. They asked me to help come up with a solution to this problem.

My Role

I took on the roles of UX and UI designer for this particular project. I made myself familiar with the information TinyTales had gathered and started brainstorming a solution by performing a 5-day design sprint. In this design sprint, I made sure I understood what TinyTales wanted me to help them with, sketched out some possible solutions, decided which solution would be most helpful, prototyped that idea, and tested the prototype on potential users.

The Design Sprint Process

Day 1:
When presented with the problem TinyTales was having, I used the first day to go through the videos and user interviews they provided. It was quickly apparent to me that the subscribers were overall happy with the app, they just wanted a way to enjoy the content in a less time-consuming manner. I made notes to simplify the problem and to find out exactly where I should focus my solution.
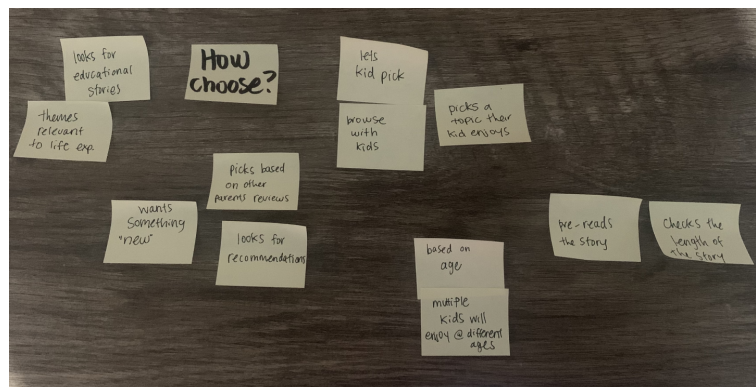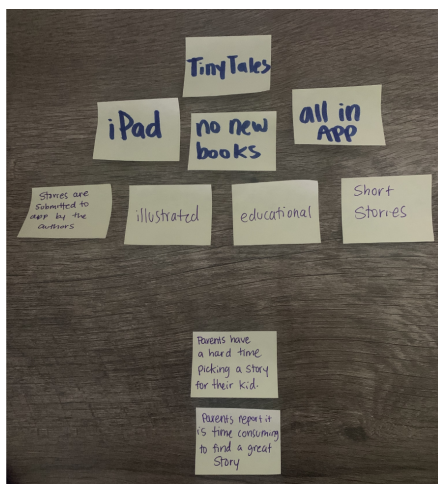
Day 2:
Once I understood what the users were looking for, I used my second day to do some competitor research and create sketches for possible solutions. There are many children's book apps out there. I found a few that had some great ideas that could be incorporated into the TinyTales app. *Little Stories: Bedtime Books* make the stories personal by putting the children into the stories. *Booka* lets kids browse book covers based on interests. Almost every app I saw also has a narration to the books, which could put TinyTales up a step for parents that want to actually read the stories to their children. The *Reading IQ* app has a large inventory of books for kids ages 2-12 and is geared to helping teach kids to read.
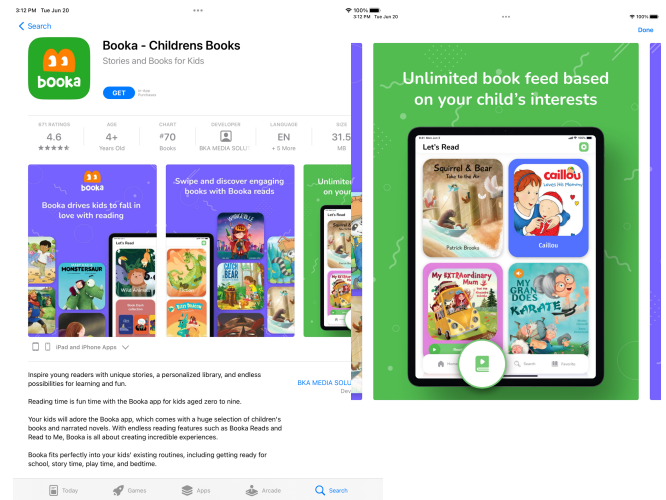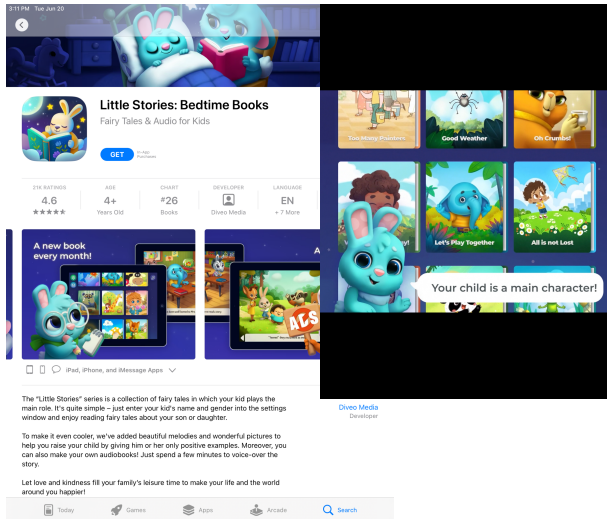
After all of this research, I came up with the idea to have parents create a "child profile" on the app where they can highlight their child's unique interests in the library's algorithm. With this idea to run with, I created possible user flow maps and sketches.
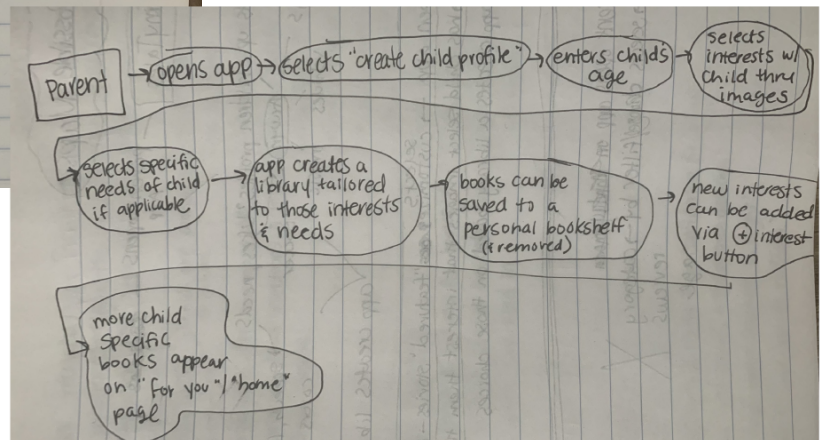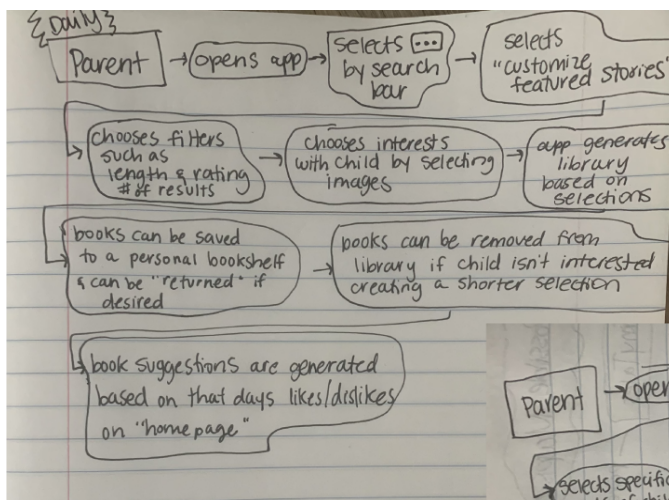
For the Crazy 8s exercise, I chose to focus on the screen that helps the parents pick a story to read to their specific child. To do this, they need to create a child profile which will create a tailored library for that child, then they can pick a book to read and rate that book afterward.
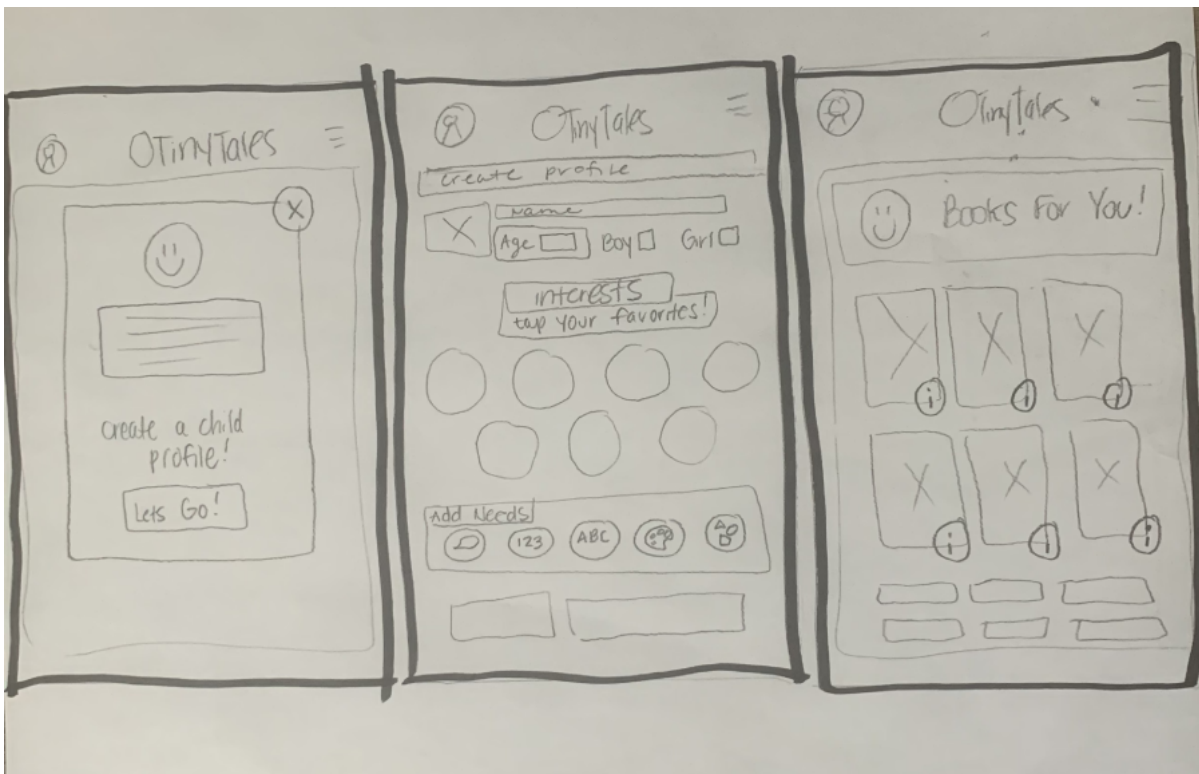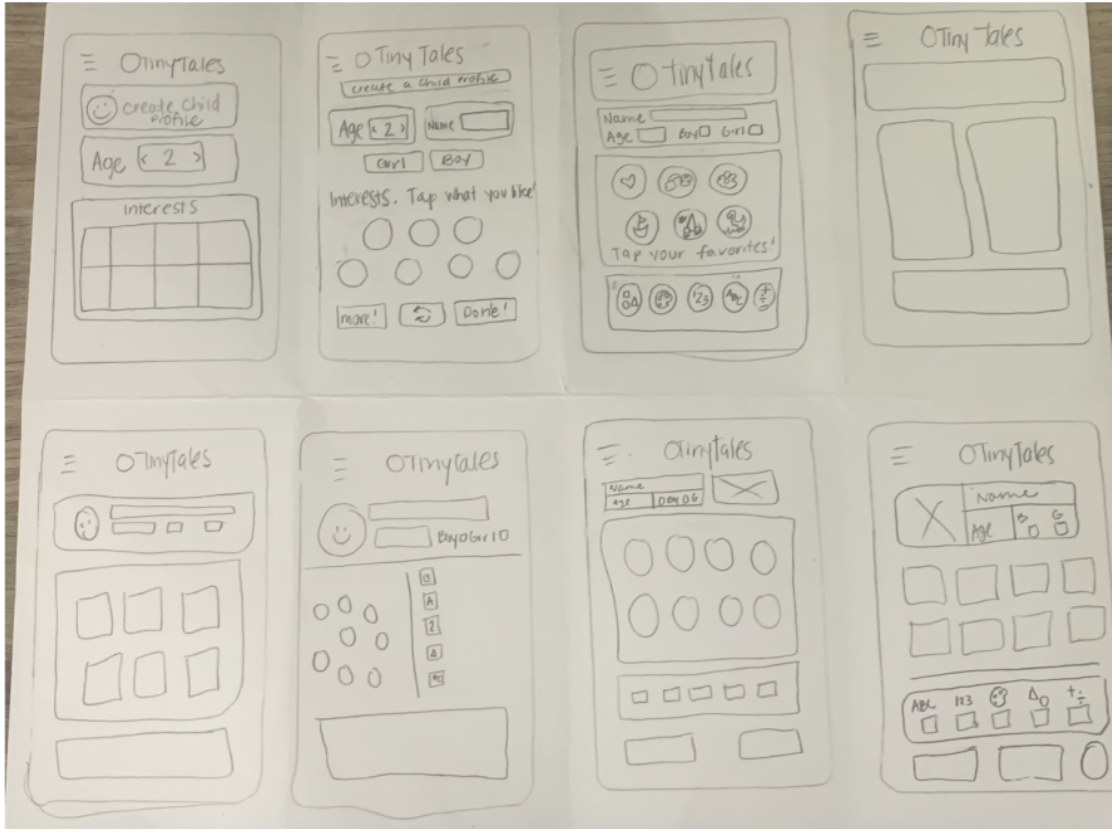
Day 3:
Once my sketches took form, I was able to choose a solution to move forward with. From the chosen sketch, I created a storyboard that would become my prototype. I chose this particular solution because I felt it was the simplest way to help parents find great stories for their children in a short amount of time. This storyboard illustrates the flow of screens these parents would encounter on their journey to make a library tailored to their child's unique interests.
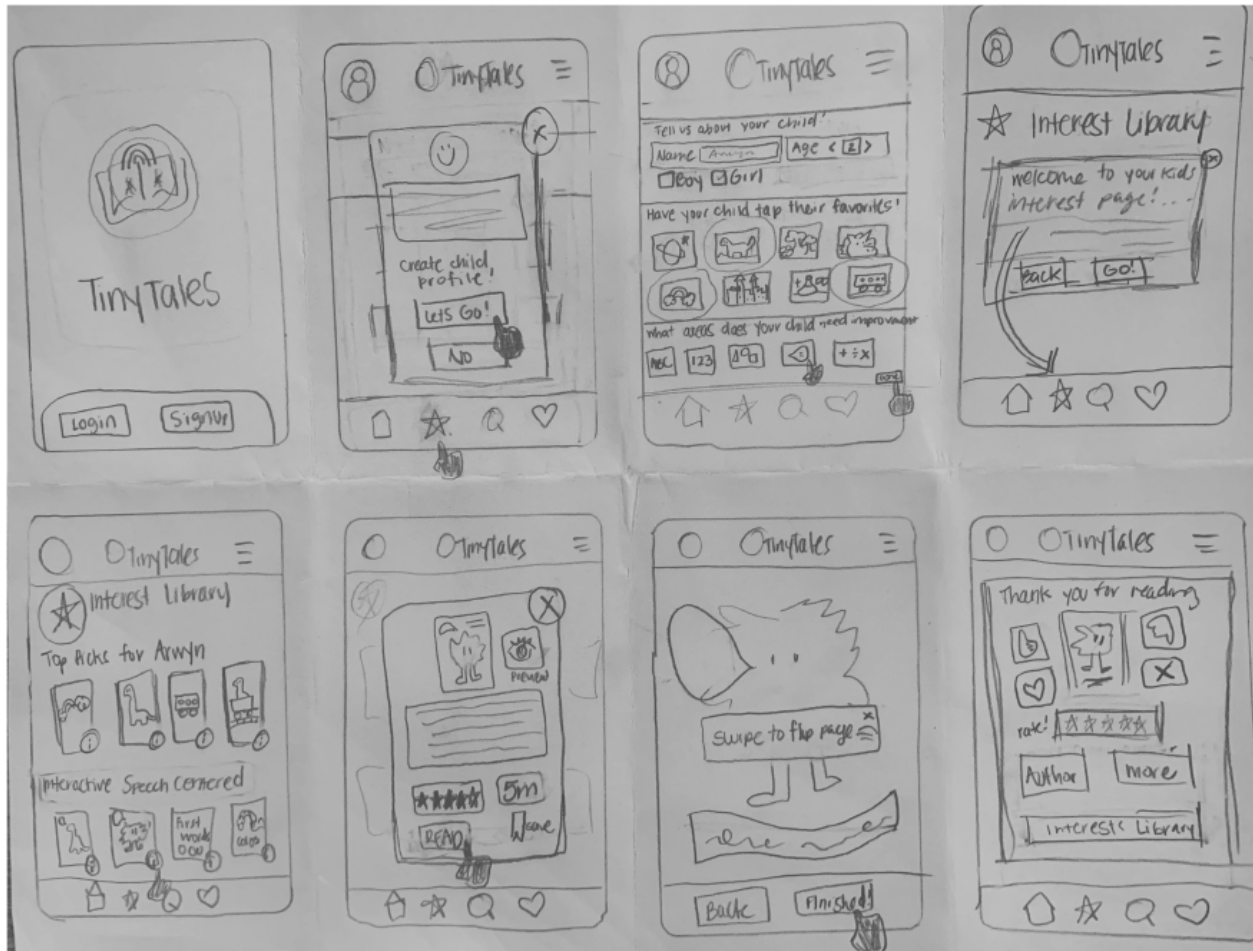
Day 4:

Once the storyboard was sketched out, I moved on to prototyping. I made sure to keep the UI consistent with the media I was provided for TinyTales. The idea behind the creation of these screens was to make a prototype that's easy to follow, fun to look at, and helps the user achieve their goals. The screens map out the user's journey to making a child profile, thus creating a unique interest library. The prototype also allows the user to choose, preview, and rate a book in the interest library. Click here to try out the prototype.
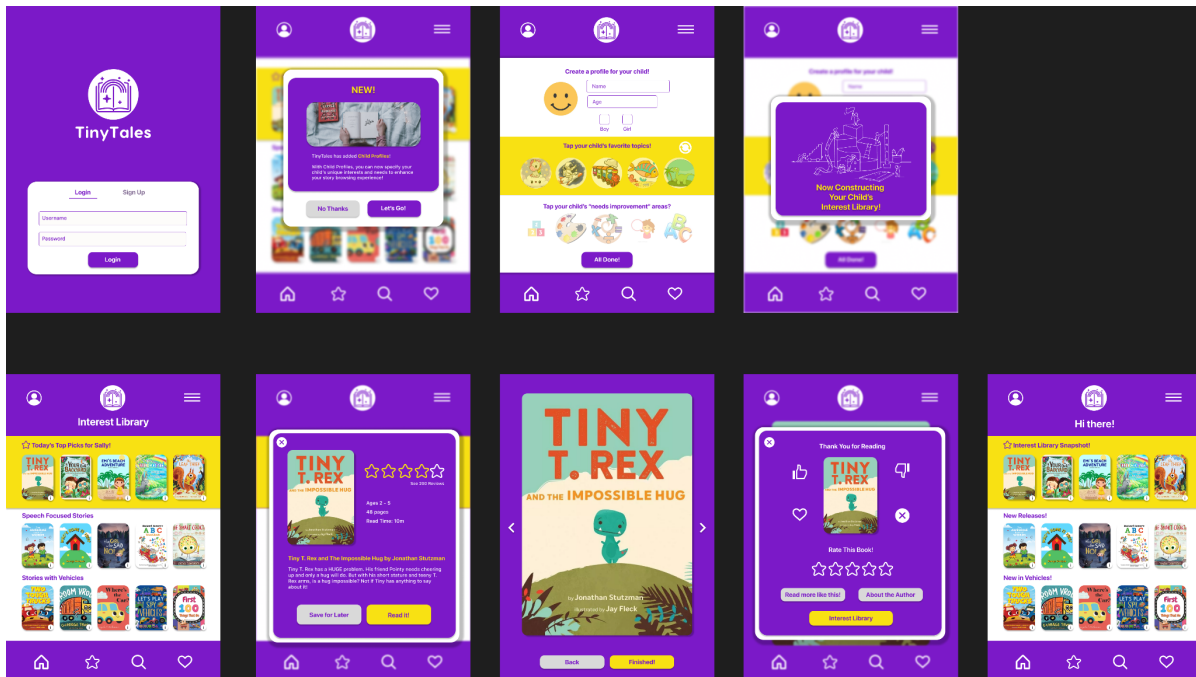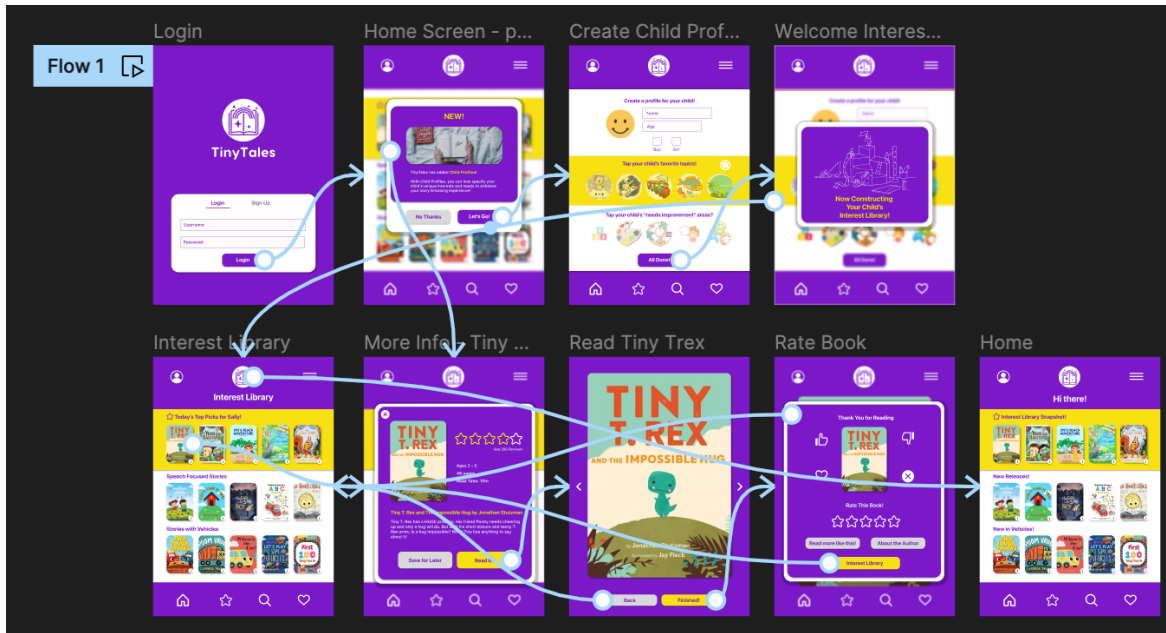
Day 5:
Now that I created a working prototype, it was time to put the prototype through user testing. I conducted 5 interview sessions to get feedback on the screens I designed for TinyTales. My interviewees were Hannah, Kathy, Michael, Adam, and Angie.

- Hannah - mother of 7-year-old who has just begun getting into reading chapter books.
    - Hannah liked the idea of the app and said she would use it with her daughter. She appreciated the overall "fun" look of the app, she was looking for more options in the child profile creation, she would like to see some kind of reward or goal system in the app that encourages self-readers to keep reading on the app.
- Kathy - grandmother of 4 kids ages 0 - 10
    - Being a "not so tech savvy grandmother", Kathy was happy to have an app that was so easy to understand. The simplicity of the design helped her understand the features easily.
- Michael - father of one 2-year-old
    - Mike easily understood the flow of the prototype. He commented on the addition of the refresh button in case the child's interests didn't pop up first. He said he would like to see a section in the interest library that also recommends something new to help a child learn about different subjects as well as their current interests.
- Adam - father of 3 children; 8, 10, & newborn
    - Adam enjoyed the colors and look of the app. He had his 10-year-old daughter with him and she suggested adding in more pop-culture material. Adam suggested adding an option to create multiple child profiles since all of his kids have different interests.
- Angie - no children yet but babysits often
    - Angie thought the app was "super cute", she can see herself using this with some of the children she babysits, she thinks the app is very user-friendly, she liked seeing the colors of the book covers instead of just the titles, would like to see some animation in the loading screen and pop-ups.
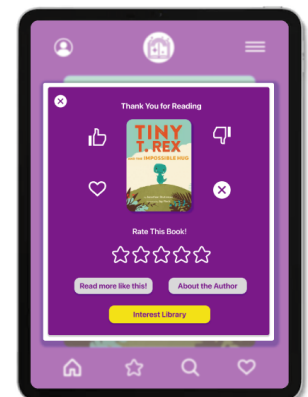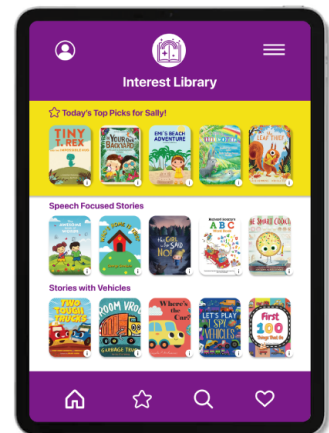
Taking all of the interview results into account, I went back to my prototype and cleaned up some of the screens. I made sure to add the elements I could add, like a refresh button for the children's interests. I felt good about the results and I feel I am able to present TinyTales with some real-world feedback.

Challenges

Going through an entire design process in just 5 days is challenging in a lot of ways. It also makes you think quickly and run with an idea once you have it. The biggest challenge I faced in this project was time management. I knew I had certain tasks to get done each day, and I had to keep to a strict schedule to complete those tasks. The assignment had me stumped on the first day and I really had to get my creative juices flowing, but once I came up with the idea for the solution, things seemed to fall together nicely. It was also a challenge to go through this entire sprint on my own. I know if I had a team to work with, I would have been able to stay on task easier and some of the tasks would have gone much smoother.

What I Learned

This design sprint taught me a lot about the UX/UI design process. Once I was given the problem that needed to be solved, it felt a lot like putting together pieces of a puzzle. It was a wonderful experience to be fully immersed in a design sprint. This is something I can see myself doing many more times, I enjoyed the challenge and was surprised with what I was able to come up with. I learned how to manage my time and organize my thoughts so I could finish the design sprint in the 5 days I was given. From this project, I came to learn that no product is ever finished and polished 100%, there is always something that can be added to make it better. And this is a challenge that I will always be happy to tackle.