

# Book Clubs at Work

In a time of No Child Left Behind and strict accountability measures for teachers and schools, the active engagement of learners is at the heart of effective literacy instruction. As educators, we strive to make our students competent, independent readers. We want them to read for personal purposes, such as information seeking or pleasure. One way to help students read for pleasure is by creating a book club at the school or community library. Book clubs can provide a variety of options for readers. Avid readers may find a book club to be a place where they can connect with others who yearn for engagement with text or information. For those who struggle with reading, a book club might be a place where they are not judged by reading skills, where they are not being assessed or questioned while they read—a place where their opinions count. Finally, for others, a book club is a place where they can be themselves, a place where reading is considered important.

A middle-school book club entitled “TIGERS: Together in Groups Earning Reading Success” incorporates aesthetic and efferent reading; writing for authentic purposes; and collaboration among the library media specialist, literacy coordinator, and classroom teachers. Most importantly, this book club provides a place of comfort for students who need a place to go for various reasons. Supported by current reading research and aligned with state and national standards, the program is an effective means for teaching and modeling real-world, authentic reading and writing tasks.

## How to Begin

Collaboration between the library media specialist and classroom teachers is integral to a successful book club. Defining the goal of the book club should



By Carianne  
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be the first decision made before forming such a group. Deciding who will take the lead is important to the success of the book club as well. Recruit teachers who love to read and will serve as models for fluency. The school’s media center is the perfect place to hold book-club meetings, since it is a literature-rich environment that lends itself to the comfort and accessibility of reading for pleasure. A book club can essentially encourage students to read for pleasure and introduce them to the resources available at the library. If the school or library budget does not allow for flexible spending, sponsors of the book club can write a school/district or community grant to purchase books—such as adolescent literature that speaks to students, both boys and girls. A first book choice for adolescents might be *Monster*, by Walter Dean Myers and Christopher Myers. Since the book is about a young man’s incarceration, many students may be able to relate to the character on some level (either from personal experience or reading about the experience). This book, and others like it, has the potential to lure students to a book club.

Recruiting members to join the book club is the next step. I have found that conducting a booktalk can be an essential piece to this puzzle. Booktalks are effective in sparking the interests of middle-school students. You can create a computer-generated pamphlet about the book club that can include a parental permission slip. Provide students with a monthly calendar to include the day(s) of the week the club meets, titles the club will be reading, and possible topics for discussion. This gives students and parents an outline of events for the month and allows time for parents and students to adapt their schedules accordingly.

Although many school-sponsored book clubs are held after school hours, you can adapt the schedule to fit the needs of the school population. Lunch periods or study halls can be used for meetings, depending on the school’s schedule. With proper administrative support, a little perseverance, and a solid plan for successful implementation, you may be able to work such programs into the

weekly/semester special rotation. The instructional benefits are worthy of such consideration.

## Modeling

Teachers and library media specialists know the importance of modeling what good readers do. It is important that you model appropriate strategies for students, such as conducting “think alouds,” modeling fluency, using context clues to figure out unfamiliar vocabulary words, and using metacognitive processes while dealing with the text. The goal is for the adults to initiate discussion but allow the students to pursue and extend the discussion. You want students to take ownership in their reading, discussion, and, most importantly, in their love of reading. You want discussion to move from factual recall of information to making real-life connections to the text.

## What Your Book Club Can Do

A great way for students to display their passion for reading is by writing book reviews. If you have a library or school Web site, students can post their reviews there. Book clubs have the potential to help adolescents develop not only intellectually but emotionally by giving them opportunities outside the classroom to have positive social interactions with peers, display their competence in an activity, and take part in meaningful participation in a community of learners. Students can also find the Web pages or publisher’s Web pages of their favorite authors on the Web site (<http://www.bettendorflibrary.com/teen/authors.htm>). When students are allowed opportunities to extend their learning, they make connections to authentic, real-world learning by reading for a purpose.

You can’t satisfy all of the readers all of the time. There are times when students drop out of the club but may be replaced by others. You will find that some members love each and every book that is read in a school year, while others are discouraged because of lack of interest, time, or skills. You must be patient, understanding, and, most importantly, open minded. Set ground rules and stick to them. Students must understand

## “One way to help students read for pleasure is by creating a book club at the school or community library”

that joining a club is a commitment, something they have signed on to do and must do wholeheartedly. For many struggling readers, keeping up with schoolwork is a daunting task, and adding the extra pressure of reading a novel that is not assigned for class can be overwhelming. It is important to adapt for members' needs. Remember that reading does not come easily for all students. You may want to do the reading during meetings if students struggle. Most importantly, work to build a community of readers, where relationships are just as important as the words on the page. Reading has the potential to take us places we have never

been, places we dream of going, and places that we never want to be. This is a gift you can share with children who need a place to do it that is inviting, warm, and accepting. Teaching literacy and life lessons can be accomplished through a book club. ■

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### Resources for Book Clubs

<http://www.kidsreads.com/clubs/index.asp>

provides valuable information for parents and students on starting a book club of their own

[http://www.minnesotahumanities.org/Literacy/dad\\_kids\\_bookclub.htm](http://www.minnesotahumanities.org/Literacy/dad_kids_bookclub.htm)

information on programs for fathers and their children to begin a book club of their own in their community

<http://www.marion.k12.fl.us/dept/lpc/bookclubs/index.html>

information for library media specialists or teachers who create a book club in their school; provides guidance on beginning a book club, how to run meetings, et cetera

[http://www.education-world.com/a\\_admin/admin/admin434.shtml](http://www.education-world.com/a_admin/admin/admin434.shtml)

an article about starting a “breakfast book club”

<http://www.barnesandnoble.com/bookclubs/runagroup.asp>

provides information on how to run a book discussion group

[http://www.spl.org/default.asp?pageID=collection\\_readinglists\\_discussiongroup](http://www.spl.org/default.asp?pageID=collection_readinglists_discussiongroup)

provides insights into starting your own book club in a school or community library

### Recommended Titles for Adolescent Readers

Anderson, Laurie Halse. *Fever 1793*.

(2002) ISBN 0689848919

Anderson, Laurie Halse. *Catalyst*. (2003)

ISBN 0142400017

Anderson, Laurie Halse. *Speak*. (2006)

ISBN 0142407321

Brooks, Kevin. *Candy*. (2006)

ISBN 0439683289

Brooks, Kevin. *Lucas*. (2004)

ISBN 0439530636

Burgess, Melvin. *Smack*. (1999)

ISBN 0380732238

Dessen, Sarah. *Just Listen*. (2006)

ISBN 0670061050

Draper, Sharon Mills. *Tears of a Tiger*.

(1996) ISBN 0689806981

Draper, Sharon Mills. *Forged by Fire*.

(1998) ISBN 0689818513

Flake, Sharon. *The Skin I'm In*. (2000).

ISBN 0786813075

Grimes, Nikki. *Bronx Masquerade*. (2002).

ISBN 0803725698

Johnson, Angela. *Heaven*. (2000)

ISBN 0689822901

Myers, Walter Dean. *Slam*. (1998)

ISBN 0590486683

Myers, Walter Dean. *Monster*. (2001)

ISBN 0064407314

Spinelli, Jerry. *Crash*. (1997)

ISBN 0679885501

Spinelli, Jerry. *Loser*. (2003)

ISBN 0060540745

Spinelli, Jerry. *Stargirl*. (2004)

ISBN 0440416779

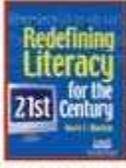
Weeks, Sarah. *So B. It*. (2005)

ISBN 0064410471

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1-58683-216-6    176 pages    \$49.95

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Beverly Nichols, Sue Shidaker, Gene Johnson, and Kevin Singer

This practitioners' guide and accompanying CD provide the basic elements of a curriculum management system that will help school districts address the need to improve student learning.



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