

Booktalking: Get Your Reluctant Readers To Listen Up!

by Terrence E. Young, Jr.

Booktalking may be the most successful way to show a young adult that reading is fun, interesting, and valuable. Many parents read stories and books to their children, usually starting when the child is very young. When the child starts preschool, the teacher continues this practice, but it is now called story time. At the elementary level, school library media specialists (SLMSs) and teachers are constantly reading books of 32 pages or less to their pre-K–3 classes for entertainment, curricular enrichments, or subject content. When the children progress to the upper elementary levels and beyond, their self-motivation and interests are the usual factors that prompt them to read books. Many other students, however, need some encouragement to read a good book. For both groups of students, booktalks can provide the impetus needed to read more books.

What is a Booktalk?

A booktalk is like a movie preview — it piques a student’s interest in reading a book. Booktalking can be a formal presentation to a class of students or an informal presentation to a few students who are looking for something to read. The goal of using this technique is to entice our students into reading a book that we have read and designated as valuable. Booktalks can be used to stimulate interest among individuals and ultimately to match the right readers with the right books. All SLMSs should strive to master the art of booktalking — our students can become excited about reading because of our efforts.

Enthusiasm and creativity are key elements of this technique. If the SLMS does not like a book, he or she cannot promote it in a credible way. A good

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presentation conveys the passion from the booktalker to the student. It doesn't matter what type of personality you have — there are as many different styles of booktalks as there are booktalkers.

Books can be grouped according to themes or subjects and can be “talked” in the classroom or in the library media center. Teachers can collaborate with SLMSs and invite them to their classrooms to present books that would augment their lessons.

Booktalks also provide students with an opportunity to discuss literature. Elementary students can participate in discussions about a different genre each month. Secondary teachers can post their own topics and assignments for students. Students can read each other's thoughts and can reply. The discussion can continue over days or weeks.

Most booktalks are for fiction titles, but nonfiction presentations can also promote reading and increase content-area knowledge. Look over the Orbis Pictus Award for Outstanding Nonfiction for Children [from the National Council of Teachers of English <http://www.ncte.org/elem/awards/orbispictus>)] and select a title to booktalk. Teachers and librarians may be surprised to see how these nonfiction titles are received by their students. An excellent starting point for finding award-winning titles is the Children's Book Awards and Other Literary Prizes website <http://falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/awards.htm>). Many publishers, from the conglomerates to the independents, now maintain a presence on the internet. Typical information on publisher websites includes images of book covers, an online catalog, publicity announcements, press releases, lists of award-winning books, author biographies, and ideas and bibliographies for holidays. Many of the sites provide a way to sign up for e-mail newsletters and booktalks. Random House has two sites of interest: one for use by high school teachers that features books for young adults

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<http://www.randomhouse.com/highschool/RHI/>

(<http://www.randomhouse.com/highschool/>) and one specializing in children's titles (www.randomhouse.com/teachers/librarians/booktalks/booktalks.html).

About the Writer

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Below are selected discussion groups, websites, and print resources to motivate you to booktalk!

Discussion Groups

Yahoo! Booktalkers (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/booktalkers>): (first group listed) This is a discussion group that centers on the art of booktalking. Topics include tips and tricks for effective booktalking, exchange of booktalks, and discussion of children's books. This site is moderated by Nancy Keane.

Yahoo! Booktalking: Discussion Group on Booktalks and Improving Booktalking Skills (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/booktalking/>): This group can help you either get started or improve your ability to convince anyone to read a book. This site is moderated by Joni Bodart, booktalker extraordinaire.

Web Resources

Bibliotecas para la Gente (BPLG) (<http://www.bibliotecasparalagente.org/>): Here you'll find booktalks written by BPLG members and other people who work with Latino/Hispanic youth. Some of the booktalks are bilingual; others are only in English. This site is maintained by the northern California chapter of the National Organization to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking (REFORMA).

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The Booktalker (www.thebooktalker.com): This is booktalking guru Joni Richards Bodart's site. Check out the monthly booktalks along with her plethora of booktalking books and ideas. The booktalking archives and her presentations for Scholastic titles will provide you with enough material to get you started. On her "Booktalks from Scholastic" page at this website, you can sign up to receive a weekly booktalk.

Motivating Middle and High School Readers with Booktalks

<www.suite101.com/article.cfm/1411/49394):> Scroll down to the article by Julie Coiro, which covers what a booktalk is, what kinds of books make good booktalks for secondary students, how to assess student participation, and what the benefits of booktalks are as well as links to other helpful sites.

Nancy Keane's Booktalks — Quick and Simple

<<http://nancykeane.com/booktalks>):> This wonderful site covers a wide range of information related to booktalks. More than 1,000 presentations are accessible by title, author, interest level, and subject. Bibliographic information is included as well as the grade interest level (IL) and the grade reading level (RL) of each book when the information is readily available in standard sources. The home page allows you to search the site. "Book Review Sources" and "Booktalking Tips" provide additional information to assist you in your booktalks. Approximately 25 titles are added each month.

Reading Matters <www.teenspoint.org/reading_matters/booktalks.asp):>

The staff at Central Rappahannock Regional Library maintains this site. The booktalks are varied: some are by staff, and some are by local students.

Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) Professional Development Center: Professional Development Topics Booktalking

<www.ala.org/ala/yalsa/professionaldev/booktalking.htm):>

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Visit this site to get a basic foundation of information and ideas on booktalking for young adults. The site notes: "Booktalking is one of the core competencies identified in <I>Young Adults Deserve the Best<I> [the YALSA handbook], which states in Area VII - Services that the young adult librarian will be able to 'utilize a variety of techniques (e.g., booktalking, discussion groups) to encourage use of materials.'"

Print Resources

Baxter, Kathleen and Marcia Agness Kochel. *Gotcha for Guys!: Nonfiction Books to Get Boys Excited about Reading*. Westport, Conn.: Libraries Unlimited, 2006.

Baxter, Kathleen and Marcia Agness Kochel. *Gotcha?: Nonfiction Booktalks to Get Kids Excited about Reading*. Westport, Conn.: Libraries Unlimited, 1999.

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<http://www.randomhouse.com/highschool/RHI/>

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