Book Clubs for Middle Schools

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Introduction

When you enter Brame Middle School library in Alexandria, Louisiana, you get a warm feeling. The librarian and student clerks are friendly and helpful. The library is spacious with several quiet, comfortable reading areas for students and teachers. Eight round tables and chairs are available for work and study areas, as well as nine designated library computers which can be used for research, etc. Many Brame students enjoy visiting their library and seem to use it for relaxation and academic purposes alike. Teachers also feel comfortable using the library and its services, but believe it could have so much more to offer. Because of finances and recent budget cuts, the library is limited in what it can offer.

Brame Middle School library has one librarian to serve approximately 800 students and fifty faculty members. A clerk is assigned to this library, but must work in the office instead. Two or three student workers per hour, about 18 total, aid the librarian as clerks. Brame is not a Title I school and serves mainly middle class students.

Brame Library has 10,000 volumes, with 2,000 in the reference collection. The number of volumes circulated annually is 18,000. This year they only have 13 serial subscriptions due to budget cuts, but in the past that number was around 40. The library has a special Louisiana collection and audiovisual collection.

Library instruction and book fairs are a few of the special programs offered in the library. Future plans include guest authors, book clubs, and computer lab updating. The current library houses 30 computers where teachers can bring an entire class for research, although the computers are relatively old. Follett's OPAC is used as online catalog, with the Dewey Decimal System is used for classification. Everything except gifts and local purchases comes "shelf ready." The collection is barcoded and circulation is automated.

The library offers online searching, reference, reserves, photocopying, computer printing, circulation of material (particularly Accelerated Reader [AR] books), and facilities for students to make up tests they have missed.

The library has flexible scheduling. Students are allowed to come to the library when they need a book, but it must be during their reading class. Any other visits are scheduled by the teacher and the class must come as a group.

The Book Fair is the primary fundraiser. There are two a year and they make about $500 on each. The PTC donates books and money as well. Brame has a canteen, and profits...
are deposited in the library account each month to buy books. The librarian often purchases books from the discount section at Books-a-Million and finds this a really good bargain.

The librarian at Brame is experienced, admired, and respected. She has held the position for 12 years and loves books and young people. She sees room for improvement and expansion for her current library if the funds were available.

**Project Description**

Educators know that reading for recreation is as important as reading for information. Studies have proven a positive correlation between reading for fun and higher reading proficiency. Young adults, especially, have an innate desire for fun and friends and book clubs are just one way to provide opportunities for both. Young adults are attracted to programs they have a hand in designing and implementing, and book clubs can offer that as well. Book clubs at Brame Middle School can draw students into the library during their free time, encourage them to participate, introduce non-readers to the joy of reading, and motivate more young adults to read for their own enjoyment. Brame Middle School Book Clubs can foster a lifelong love of books and reading and appreciation for libraries, as well as improving academic and social skills.

**Project Objectives**

Various book clubs will be formed to create the conditions for young adults to talk about books they like (or dislike), find out what other young adults think, and build on young adults' love of socializing with peers which, in the long run, will produce better readers by improving reading skills and instill a lifelong love of reading. These book clubs will also reinforce reading skills and encourage students to read independently, taking responsibility for their own literacy. Brame Middle School Book Clubs will also teach valuable skills: reading for understanding, relating reading to personal experience, participating in discussion by taking turns and respecting the opinions of others.

The objectives will be achieved by:

- Surveying students and teachers, either written or orally, to get their input on book clubs.
- Deciding what type of book clubs to offer, based on survey results.
- Involving students in negotiating places and times to meet, along with the pacing and discussion of the books. They take on responsibility for their own literacy and learn to value one another as readers and learners.
- Passing the word! Send information out through emails, posters, bookmarks, teachers, friends, etc.
- Encouraging local businesses, companies, organizations, movie theatres, etc., to donate free passes or items for door prizes or incentives. Incentives never hurt!
- Modeling book reviewing during club meetings. with questions answered and discussion facilitated if necessary.

**Planning Activities**

- Discussing and planning next meeting's book and activities.
- Allowing students time to fill out evaluation forms to better plan for the next book club meeting.
Student Objectives

Students will:

- establish community rules for group formation and interaction.
- choose what to read and establish their own schedule for reading and discuss books
- read for the joy of it, learning to value themselves and others as readers and learners.

Project Background

Brame Middle School has not had book clubs in the past. The current librarian and several language arts teachers have informally discussed book clubs for several years. The librarian and language arts teachers feel book clubs might help with motivating recreational reading, address some of the high interest/low level problems, reinforce reading skills, and be "the" club that some students simply need to belong to for lack of one that fits their needs.

Project Method

Resources for this project will be information obtained through textbooks, educational magazines, the Internet, teachers, students, and other libraries and their book clubs. Equipment needed for this project will be a computer and printer.

Literature Review


This article contains fabulous ideas for the fantasy book club but the author also includes typical book club meeting outlines which may be used for any type of book club. These outlines detail suggestions for the three consecutive meetings beginning with book introduction through evaluation and choosing the next book club "new book".

"Flippin' Pages with the No Name Book Club." *School Library Journal*. 20 May 2008.

This article stresses the importance of letting the students create the book clubs themselves. It gives them ownership and control, helping them develop important life skills. Book clubs must be put together by students as much as possible with reading lists chosen by the students or groups of student selectors. This article suggests the use of contests, since they can be a big motivator for many students. This article reinforces my idea of giving students ownership in their book club to motivate them and get them more involved.


The author stresses the fact that it is important to educate the "gatekeepers", teachers, librarians, and parents, involved in the YA reading audience. The gatekeepers often have a limited knowledge of the richness and depth of YA literature. In addition, parents often want their children to look for harder, longer books which only lead to frustration for the child.
Finding out what's cool for YA is another approach to reaching them through book clubs. Graphics and other products in media are another place to focus our attention to what might turn young adults on to reading.


Although this article is about an Internet book club, it has relevant information and ideas for any type of book club. It stresses that for many people, belonging to a book club is the first time they may have belonged to any type of group or club. The article also states the importance of putting together readers who share common interests. Book clubs are a place to chat or socialize for all ages.


Kate Messner discusses taking the book club a step further through videoconferencing with authors. While it's great to meet an author in person, similar interaction is possible even if the author is on the screen. Messner discusses authors' web sites, email links, and even blogs and tweets as a way of getting started. Included is also a list of authors available for videoconferencing. She goes into detail with steps for "before" and "on the day of" your videoconference.


This book is a how-to-do-it manual covering many topics ranging from customer service to booktalking to technology to youth involvement. The chapters on programming and youth involvement include numerous ideas that can be incorporated into book clubs. The authors admit that book clubs take time but that they can also be very rewarding for those involved, students and leaders alike. They also remind us that book clubs can often take a month or two to settle down and that a group will constantly be changing. Students coming and going will add unique flavor to a group.

**Problems**

The main problem I encountered during this entire project was finding a good time for the book club to meet. Before and after school was not an option, since the majority of the students ride buses. There are only two short recesses, so that was not an option. The only choice was to try to meet during the students' lunch breaks, which were somewhat longer than the recesses. We eventually decided to serve donated pizza on book club days, which allowed us extra time if we ate and discussed at the same time.

**Conclusion**

Young adults are often sent to the library to research an assignment or find information for a report. Therefore, reading and the library are associated with work. There are so many other reasons to read! Young adults need to learn that reading for recreation is as important as reading for information. Book clubs can draw young adults into the library and motivate them to read for enjoyment. In addition, studies prove there is a positive correlation between reading for fun and higher reading proficiency. Young adults who
devote more time to reading seem to do better in school and beyond. For this reason, teachers and librarians need to support free reading.

This project helped me realize that some students may not have access to the same comfortable surroundings for reading as other students. Book clubs can also prove to students that adults have made time for them, are listening to them and value their opinions.

I enjoyed getting to know the students better, learning about books that appeal to them and see them share their enthusiasm for books through the book club. Seeing their energy and enthusiasm energized me as well! I can't wait to start my own book club in my own library using what I have learned while completing this project.

I learned it's so important to make a place and time for those who like to read. Teachers and librarians alike need to support free reading. It seems book clubs will attract those who love to read and if structured correctly, can also prove the joy of reading to nonreaders. What I have done and learned in this project is just a stepping stone to what I hope to achieve as a school librarian. More than ever I realize reading is an important activity to help students develop other skills and it is simply one of the librarians' jobs to provide fun and meaningful programs where students can do just that.
Appendix A

Story Map
Use this story map to outline a story or to create your own

Name of story

Setting Description

Characters

Problem/Conflict

Action/Story Event

Action/Story Event

Solution

Ending
Appendix B

References


