Nonfiction Book Clubs and Beyond

by MARY J. JOHNSON

COMMON CORE STATE Standards have been picking up steam throughout K-12 education communication networks—professional journals, blog posts, Twitter educator groups, conference presentations, state planning committees, and more. Given the intentional Common Core shift away from heavy fiction reading toward more expository reading (reading for information), school librarians need to take a fresh look at their role in promoting expository reading skills.

The first three articles in this “InfoText” series explored professional learning communities (PLCs) centered on teaching expository reading, ways to incorporate nonfiction into library learning spaces, and strategies for teaching nonfiction text features in print and online. In this last article, the focus will be on nonfiction book clubs and programming. Some of the advice comes from public library colleagues who are experts in planning such programming for their communities. Nonfiction programming in school libraries is an area ripe for exploration.

STARTING A NONFICTION BOOK CLUB

Book clubs do not have to rely on genre fiction to attract members. Studies of reading preferences have shown significant interest in nonfiction reading among young people, often (but not always) among boys. The club can be specific or general in nature, although “Nonfiction Book Club” will draw fewer members than one with a catchy name such as “Take a Hike Book Club” or “No Way Science.”

A ReadWriteThink “Start Your Own Book Club” activity (see References at the end of this article) covers “What You Need” and “Here’s What to Do,” along with extra tips. Wise advice indicates, “Different book clubs will need different amounts of adult supervision, so provide guidance but don’t be afraid to step back and let them run the show!”

KidsRead.com also promotes a student-run book club model based on the simple premise that “a reading group or a book club is just a bunch of friends who decide to read the same book and then get together to talk about it.”

The school librarian/sponsor willing to take a back seat may give up some control, but young members will practice valuable organizational and communication skills. With students in charge, activities can move in any direction. Soon the students may even be producing book trailers and “READ” photo posters of members reading nonfiction!

ONLINE BOOK CLUB OPTIONS

The proliferation of online book clubs—a search term that results in 37,100,000 hits on Google—speaks to a common desire to share reading experiences. Social networking websites for book lovers invite members to participate in specific book groups, build virtual book shelves, and rate and discuss books. Shelfari (http://www.shelfari.com) and Goodreads (http://www.goodreads.com) include teen and young adult book groups. Students who prefer face-to-face book
clubs with their friends can still use the resources of online clubs to explore nonfiction titles and recommendations.  
Many public libraries also coordinate online book clubs as a free service to their communities. DearReader.com has a search box for finding local library book clubs by zipcode.  
Online book clubs rarely focus on nonfiction for children or teens. A new Beta website, however, called BookClubIt (http://www.bookclubit.com) might be the perfect solution for school librarians looking for online book club tools. According to the BookClubIt site, readers can “…create, start, and manage your very own online book club. You can do all the things you do in a book club, it’s just online!” The terms of service require users under age thirteen to obtain parental consent.

**TWITTER READERS**

A less formal Twitter-based nonfiction book club offers the advantages of simple start-up steps and ease of ongoing use. “Twitter Readers” simply agree upon a hashtag such as #nf tweeters or #EMSnfclub (Eagleview Middle School Nonfiction Club) to be used in all nonfiction book comments. As book choices change, the conversation continues under the same hashtag. Since young people read a diverse range of nonfiction materials outside of class, Twitter Readers might also enjoy discussing magazines and informational websites.

Silvia Rosenthal Tolisano, author of “Langwitches Blog,” has written a comprehensive and colorful “Guide to Twitter in the K-8 Classroom” for educators still unsure about using Twitter with students. On a practical note, she advises setting up a single classroom Twitter account for students under the age of thirteen.

**BEYOND THE BOOK CLUB**

Certainly, school librarians may explore programming ideas other than nonfiction book clubs. YALSA, the Young Adult Library Services Association division of the American Library Association, collects resources and programming ideas for librarians who work with tweens and teens (http://www.ala.org/yalsa).

The New York Times Learning Network sponsors a yearly “Found Poem” contest for students to submit poetry “composed of words and phrases taken from one Times article, past or present, or several.” What a powerful combination of poetry and informational reading!

A Family Nonfiction Reading Night, a “Shhh! I’m Reading” afterschool reading club, a nonfiction book donation service project… the list continues! No matter what programming school librarians opt to sponsor, they will be building a lifelong love of reading based on personal choices.

**REFERENCES:**


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