What Is a Booktalk? What Is a Booktalking Club?

A booktalk is a two-to-three minute presentation which a student (or teacher, or anyone really!) gives to persuade others to pick up a book they’ve already read and enjoyed. At Scholastic, we believe very strongly in the power of booktalks. We’ve presented them at schools and conferences all over the country. Some schools loved booktalks so much that they asked us for additional booktalking opportunities. Thus, booktalking clubs were formed! Meeting before or after school (or during lunch or free periods), members of these clubs work together to craft fantastic booktalks and spread the word to their school and community about great books.

Why start a booktalking club?

Using our free resources as a guide, we think you’ll find that a booktalking club achieves many of your professional goals with very little effort required on your part. The clubs rely heavily on peer-guidance and offer students a clear delineation between classroom and club time. Our surveys indicate that students who participated in booktalk clubs read more often for pleasure, got more enjoyment out of reading, and were much more likely to suggest a good book to a friend. The data also indicates that they felt more confident in their writing, editing, and performing skills. We accomplished these results in just 45 minutes a week over the course of 10 weeks, and we think you can too!

How do I get started?

Review “Starting a Booktalk Club: Success in 12 Weeks.” (To find this document, log into your Chairperson’s Toolkit, go to Fair Files, and enter keyword, “Booktalk.”) Here, you’ll find a week-by-week guide to getting your club off the ground, as well as answers to frequently asked questions. We look forward to hearing about your success!

Booktalking Club: Troubleshooting and FAQs

How do I find students to join the club?

As is the case with many clubs, much of it will depend on the club moderator and others who are joining. You’ve already gotten the idea to do this, so we have confidence that you’ll be a great moderator! Once students hand in permission forms and collect their books, encourage them to ask friends to join. Consider making “Ask Me About Booktalking Club” pins or stickers (designed by students!) for especially gregarious members. Know that a club where students have fun is bound to grow. Give it time!

What if a student enjoys the club but cannot keep up with the pace of our reading?

For the sake of their self-confidence, we don’t necessarily suggest pairing students with books below grade level, though if they gravitate in that direction, we do not discourage it. Look for books that are fun and easy to read quickly. Perhaps a reference-style work of nonfiction, a companion guide to a new movie, a book that teaches a skill or craft, or a short graphic novel? Remember: this should never feel like a chore.
What if students decide they do not like the books they selected?
We believe that even good readers abandon books for various reasons. If your students don’t love their selections, encourage them to make new ones. Just remind them of the deadline to begin creating the booktalk; if booktalks are due in three days, a 400-page epic might not be the best fit. Take this as an opportunity to start a conversation: why did he or she choose the book in the first place? How can he or she select a book that might be a better fit in the future?

I see a lot of discussion of peer-led activities. What if my students get off task?
Although it would be preferable to let them choose their own partners, first consider making pairings that rely on students you know will stay focused. Most importantly, you set the tone for these activities. If you are at your desk working on your lesson plans while they do cooperative work, you may find that they have more trouble staying focused than if you are visiting groups and offering feedback. Getting off topic is okay sometimes. Of course a book about a lost dog can lead to a discussion of family pets, and that’s part of the communal reading experience! Just be sure to challenge students to channel that enthusiasm and energy into their writing and performing.

My students keep picking books that are either too hard or too easy for them. Should I intervene?
It’s tempting to guide your students to books that are challenging, but remember that this is not a classroom activity. Students joined this club for pleasure, and the activities should feel pleasurable. For the most part, they should be allowed to make their own choices. However, if you have strong relationships with your students, consider talking to them individually. Ask them to self-assess their progress. For some students, this may be the reminder they need to get back on track. If it’s not though, stay optimistic; they may find their niches as the club continues.

My students have very ambitious ideas of starting a booktalking culture in our school. Should I encourage them to be more realistic?
Although you don’t want them to be disappointed, we encourage you to support your club’s booktalking dreams – enthusiasm is contagious! Allow your students to get your administration, staff, and students hyper-charged about booktalks. This is how big changes start!

We’ve reached the end of 12 weeks. Now what?
Congratulations! Your booktalk club is up and running and you should feel a strong sense of accomplishment. Now you have two options; follow the pattern established in our outline (read, write, peer-edit, practice, perform, repeat), or forge your own trail based on suggestions from your students. In most cases, we think it will be some combination of the two. We believe that the structure we provided is strong, but that personalization will make it even stronger. Listen carefully to the feedback your students give you, and find a plan that works for you!