

Book-Talking

Whet kids' appetites for reading by giving them daily tastes of the most appealing books you can find.

WHY

One of the best things you can do to promote reading volume is to deliver daily, brief, enthusiastic book talks. Linda Gambrell, an authority on kids' motivation to read, says that the teacher's "blessing of the book" is the single most powerful way to get kids to pick it up (1996). The benefits of book-talking include:

- **Efficiency:** In a matter of minutes, a well-delivered book-talk typically inspires many children to read it.
- **Exposure:** Over time, book talks make kids aware of the vast universe of books, spotlighting diverse genres, formats, lengths, topics, structures, and themes.
- **Inclusivity:** When you mindfully book-talk a wide range of titles, including those at which some might initially look askance, you promote respect for all readers' tastes and capabilities and diminish the perception that "harder is better."
- **Social Energy:** Book talks get kids buzzing about books! Those who have read the book chime in, fostering others' interest in getting their hands on it.
- **Modeling:** Book-talking is a low-key, conversational way for you to share your own reading life, broadening kids' understanding of what it means to be a reader.
- **Commitment:** Scheduling daily book talks is a great way to hold yourself accountable for rooting out exciting new titles to share.

WHEN

Ideally, book talks happen daily, a ritual that kids look forward to and come to expect. Snack time is a perfect opportunity because kids are relaxed and receptive. Prior to long weekends and school vacations, highlight several books in order to provide kids with options and underscore the importance of reading over the breaks. Penny Kittle delivers sparkling book talks every day to her high school students. In *Book Love* (2012), she says that she usually talks about 4–5 books a day during the first week of school because she wants to "put a lot of titles out there."

* HOW

To bless a book effectively, do the following:

- Hold the book up—let kids see it. Show the cover; flip through the pages. Point out any interesting features (e.g., endpapers, maps, photo inserts).
- Describe its genre. (“*Chains* by Laurie Halse Andersen is historical fiction, but it feels more like realistic fiction because it utterly transports you back to lower Manhattan in the 1700s.”)
- Relate it to books kids are already familiar with. (“If you liked *Because of Winn-Dixie*, you’re going to love *Rain, Reign* with its equally lovable dog . . .”)
- Read a well-chosen passage aloud. It’s important for potential readers to hear the “voice” of the book to see if it appeals to them.
- Provide a concise, spoiler-free plot summary.
- Invite kids who’ve read the book to further endorse it and build social energy.
- Pass the book around and/or leave it out and accessible so kids can have a look at it right away.

Armed with credible reviews, you are perfectly capable of book-talking books you haven’t read. Just make sure to preview the book and select appealing pages to display and read. And be honest; tell kids, “I haven’t read this yet, but I know you fantasy lovers are going to want to get your hands on it right away. You can tell me about it after you’ve devoured it!”

Book-talk authors with multiple books, with whom a reader can grow. Authors Kevin Henkes, Jacqueline Woodson, and Kate DiCamillo have written picture books, chapter books, and novels.

It’s vital to bless books from a wide range of genres and levels of complexity to include readers of all stripes. Penny Kittle suggests keeping a running list of titles you’ve book-talked. Not only does this provide kids with a resource to refer back to, it helps you create balance over time.

Invite guest book-talkers to share their favorite titles: fellow teachers, custodians, secretaries, lunch monitors, bus drivers, administrators, and so on. Of course, include the school and community librarians. Guest book-talkers are a wonderful way to capture the vibrancy of a community of readers. People read an astonishing range of things in an astonishing variety of ways. See sample book talk on page 115.



MHS campus supervisor and voracious reader Gigi Rothweiler shares her latest picks.