

BENEFITS

Children who are involved in a book discussion group benefit in several ways:

- their interest in reading is maintained and expanded
- they are exposed to a variety of books that they might not read on their own
- they learn to read critically, thinking about theme, characters, etc.
- they may meet new friends, and other children outside of their own circles
- they learn to interact in a group, respecting others' opinions and right to speak
- they gain confidence about voicing their own opinions and speaking out

STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION

Membership: There are many types of book clubs. They may be comprised of just children, with an adult facilitator, or have mother-daughter, father-son, parent-child, even grandparent-grandchild pairings. They may include just a group of friends or children from the neighborhood, or they may be wider and more diverse, with members recruited by advertising in school newsletters or community newspapers. There should be a minimum of 5 and a maximum of 15 participants at each meeting – enough to keep the conversation going, and yet allow every child a chance to speak. An ideal number of members is 8 to 12.

Ages: We suggest that children be in third grade or above before joining a book club. Until then, children are just learning to read, and getting the idea of reading for pleasure. Asking them to analyze and think deeply about what they're reading may inhibit their recreational reading at this stage. The age range within the group should not be more than two or three years, so that reading and comprehension levels are similar.

Who should join?: Children should be able to read the books on their own, without difficulty, i.e. reading should always be fun. If the books are too difficult for the child, or reading is seen as a chore, joining the club may be counterproductive.

How often to meet? The Carykids Book Club usually meets every two weeks – long enough to finish the book, but short enough to remember it!

RESOURCES

Books at Cary Library:

jRef 028.5 D Dodson, Shireen.

The Mother-Daughter Book Club: How Ten Busy Mothers and Daughters Came Together to Talk, Laugh, and Learn Through Their Love of Reading

jRef 028.5 G and [PARENT] j028.5 G Gelman, Judy, & Krupp, Vicky.

The Kids' Book Club Book: Reading Ideas, Recipes, Activities, and Smart Tips for Organizing Terrific Kids' Book Clubs

[PARENT] 028.55 G Goldstone, Lawrence.

Deconstructing Penguins: Parents, Kids, and the Bond of Reading

web sites with book suggestions:

www.carylrary.org/children/carykids.html

www.multcolib.org/talk/guides.html

So you want to start a children's book club...

Suggestions from the CaryKids Book Club @ Cary Library



BOOKS

Choosing Books: Children will enjoy helping to choose the books. You may want to present a list of books, with short descriptions, and have members vote for the ones they'd like to read over the next few months. Or you may prefer to bring two or three suggested books to each meeting, and let the kids vote each time. In an adult-child group, each parent and child may have a turn to suggest books.

Books need to be both interesting to read and appropriate for discussion. Not every good story has enough to discuss. Look for conflict, moral dilemmas, decisions to be made, depth of character – these will provide enough “meat” for an interesting discussion with varying points of view.

Get suggestions from other book clubs, teachers, librarians, library websites, books about book clubs. See below for a list of resources. Whenever possible, an adult should read the book first, making sure the content, reading level, and interest level are appropriate.

You may want to have an ongoing theme for a period of time. For example, you may concentrate on historical fiction, or fantasy, or animals. Although most children's book clubs read fiction because of the discussion possibilities it affords, some non-fiction books, e.g. biographies, may work as well.

Obtaining the books: If there are enough copies of the book in the library network (e.g. Minuteman), members can each reserve a copy. Make sure there is enough time for the books to arrive at the library. Of course, members can also buy the books – in this case, you may want to make sure the book is available as a paperback.

A few suggested books from the Carykids Book Club (grades 4-6):

Clements, A.	<i>A Week in the Woods</i>
Fletcher, R.	<i>Flying Solo</i>
Funke, C.	<i>The Thief Lord</i>
Horvath, P.	<i>The Trolls</i>
Kurzweil, A.	<i>Leon and the Spitting Image</i>
L'Engle, M.	<i>A Wrinkle in Time</i>
Lord, B.	<i>In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson</i>
Napoli, D. J.	<i>The King of Mulberry Street</i>
O'Brien, R.	<i>Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH</i>
Park, L.	<i>The Kite Fighters</i>
Schlitz, L.	<i>A Drowned Maiden's Hair</i>
Snyder, Z. K.	<i>The Egypt Game</i>
Speare, E.	<i>The Sign of the Beaver</i>
Woodruff, E.	<i>The Ravenmaster's Secret</i>

DISCUSSION

It is worth stressing that everyone should make every attempt to finish the book before attending the meeting. Children who have not finished the book will not be able to participate properly; those who have finished should be able to talk about the ending without feeling they're spoiling it for those who haven't finished.

Who leads the discussion?:

- an adult facilitator
- a different child each week
- every child asks a question to stimulate discussion

If preparing questions is seen as a chore or “homework” for children, then it is better not to do it in this way. Reading and belonging to the book club should always be seen as fun.

No matter who leads, questions and topics should have been prepared ahead of time, so that there is lots to talk about. If children are “leading,” the adult(s) should make sure that everyone has a chance to speak, and that shy children are encouraged to give their opinions.

Discussion topics: To ensure that everyone has understood the story, the discussion can start with a brief review of the plot, characters, and setting, or members can ask about anything they didn't understand. After that, open-ended questions will facilitate discussion. Emphasize that there is no right or wrong answer. Emphasize also that it is perfectly fine not to have liked the book; discussions are often enhanced if some have liked the book and some have not.

Here are some possible discussion topics:

- Describe a funny scene, or a sad scene.
- Who was your favorite or least favorite character? Why?
- Who is the main character?
- What do you think was the climax of the story?
- What were the problems that needed to be solved? How were they solved?
- Why did a particular character act in a certain way?
- What would you have done in this situation?
- Have you ever been in a similar situation? Tell us about it.
- Was the author trying to make a point? What was it? Did the author do a good job of making that point? Was it too heavy-handed or didactic?
- Discuss the writing. What techniques were used?, e.g. humor, suspense
- Read a favorite (short!) passage. Why did you like it?
- Did you like the ending? If not, how would you have liked the book to end?

- How would you like the story to continue?
- What part did you like best? Why?
- Can you think of other books that are similar? How?
- What did you think of the illustrations? The cover?
- Did you like the book? Why or why not?

Depending on the age of the children, it may sometimes be advisable not to ask the follow-up questions, such as why they liked a particular passage or character. They may be happy to say that they liked a particular character, but may be stumped as to why. Again, avoid anything that inhibits the expression of ideas, or that takes away the enjoyment of the book.

Follow-up: Bring with you to the meeting further information to enhance the story: sequels, historical background, pictures of something described in the book, etc.

ACTIVITIES

Besides the book discussion, supplemental activities related to the book can further enrich the book club experience. Some possibilities:

- drawing pictures of particular scenes from the book
- acting out scenes
- writing a letter to or from a character
- keeping a diary from a character's point of view
- cooking, games, or crafts related to the story

FOOD

Just as with adult book clubs, food adds interest at children's book group meetings. If the book to be discussed features a particular food, it may be fun to provide that food. At the Carykids Book Club, we have found that it works well to start off with a snack, then have a break halfway through the meeting for another snack. Having food available throughout the discussion proved to be distracting. Make sure you are aware of any allergies before providing food.