

Citation metadata

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Date: June 2013
From: Collected Magazine(Issue 9)
Publisher: School Library Association of New Zealand Aotearoa
Document Type: Column
Length: 1,839 words

Main content

Article Preview :

Many will know of Nancy Keane and her fabulous site Booktalks Quick and Simple. For many years Nancy has been updating her lists of books, which are fresh and ripe for book-talking. She gives you hints and tips. When I first started out I used these all the time. Her books are great too; if you are new to this book-talking lark then I recommend investigating her work.

Book-talks are one of the most effective ways of getting readers interested in books. A recommendation is a powerful persuasive tool. When a friend recommends a book you are more likely to read it, this works for students too as we know how powerful peer pressure can be. A librarian recommending books they have read is another avenue. Book shops use stickers on books recommending them; well known people promote books on TV, in promotional material and online. We all like to have someone sell us a book, tell us what it's about, compare it to other books and encourage us to read it. It's hard to resist a charm offensive, especially when the books are carefully selected for the audience.

It has been my experience that if you offer to do a book-talk to classes there are few teachers who will turn you down. To start, you are going to need some great books, that you have read and that are already popular in your school. Next up--book a class, practice at home, then start with a couple of books and make your production bigger as you build confidence. Once you've got the students and a couple of staff members on-side you will be feeling the rush that comes from speaking about something you love to others, you will be just fine!

At our school the Year 9 and 10 students have a reading period every second week. I select resources of interest to the class: are they fiction boys, sporty types, practical guys? I try to get a mix that fits their tastes and reading ability with some wild cards--books which might be 'good for you' books, or off-the-wall weird and wonderful books. Often students don't see the books on the shelves, and selling them makes them far more likely to be borrowed. I always choose a mix of non-fiction and fiction, and something that is 'hot right now'. Yes, if the books aren't a hit it makes more shelving at the end of the day, but usually highlighted books are issued that period.

Good-natured banter ensues as the guys gather for the talk. Humour is one of the best ways to engage the students. We have lots of laughs and everyone is free to contribute. Their teachers are there, the rules are that they don't mark or do...

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Source Citation

Schaumann, Bridget. "Book talks: not so quick and simple, but the perfect way to engage students with reading." *Collected Magazine*, no. 9, 2013, p. 7+. Accessed 7 Nov. 2020.

Gale Document Number: GALE|A342178185

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