

TEEN BOOK DISCUSSION GROUPS
@ THE LIBRARY

Constance Dickerson

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SERIES EDITOR'S FOREWORD

We librarians love to bring teens and books together. Finding “the right book for the right reader at the right time” is both challenging and rewarding. Matching a teen with the best book involves using all our talents, abilities, and intuition; we must assess his or her reading ability, interests, and specific needs. It requires a practical and theoretical knowledge of the developmental needs of teens, as well as a broad and current knowledge of contemporary young adult literature. The results are often rewarding. What could be better than a student saying, “I just read that book you recommended for me and it was GREAT! What should I read next?”

While working with a group of enthusiastic and diverse young teens in the after-school reading group at my junior high school, I encountered a somewhat different challenge. Leading these interesting discussions was akin to providing reader’s advisory for each of them. The one-to-one interaction I was familiar with became a task of finding the best books to satisfy and meet the needs of many teens. Constance Dickerson’s *Teen Book Discussion Groups @ the Library* would have definitely helped me to do a better job.

Whether you are a relative newcomer or a seasoned pro, Dickerson clearly takes you step-by-step through the system of creating a teen book discussion group. In the first part, she describes how to make a book discussion program work. In 15 steps she takes you through the entire process:

- from selecting books to creating questions,
- from making rules to steering the discussion,
- from recruiting group members by providing snacks to using online resources, and
- from establishing a group size to strategies for including more boys.

Her sensible ideas and thoroughly tested tips will ensure that you get started on the right foot.

Whatever your level of experience in leading teen book discussion groups, Dickerson’s 50 discussion guides will prove to be informative and stimulating. She includes high quality, high interest, and highly discussable titles. No matter what the variety of genders, ages, or interests of your participants, I’m confident you’ll find books to interest and challenge your readers. Whether her guides provide a springboard for your own ideas or you use her suggestions, you’ll find teens eager to respond to the challenge.

And the payoff? You know how passionate teens can be about reading. Once you provide them a safe and secure venue to talk about books they love, stand back and prepare to be rewarded in excess for the effort you've put forth. They will not only talk about what the book means to them, they will also reveal their feelings. Their perceptions will surprise and inform you. When you expect more from them, ask more questions, and allow them to talk more, teens will open up in unexpected ways.

I'm constantly learning about what goes into creating a successful book discussion group. I know this latest addition to the teens@the library series will help me do my job better. Almost everyone who conducts teen book discussions ends up saying, "I get more out of it than the kids. I love to hear their thoughts and feelings about the books we discuss. They're amazing." Who wouldn't want more of that kind of reward in their professional lives?

Joel Shoemaker
teens@thelibrary Series Editor

PREFACE

Young people who engage in good conversation about interesting books grow to be critical and careful readers. They also gain invaluable experience expressing opinions in a group. Articulating ideas about a variety of interesting subjects is its own reward.

All too often, teenagers only talk about literature in the pressured environment of a formal classroom setting. The structured but informal meetings encouraged in *Teen Book Discussion Groups @ the Library* provide the freedom of a relaxed setting with no exact right or wrong answers. Students often say, “I’ve never thought about it that way before,” in response to another’s opinion or interpretation. Learning to respect and consider different points of view fosters global and empathetic thinking.

The adult who skillfully facilitates a discussion will witness its benefits firsthand. It is my belief that anyone, armed with a good set of questions, can lead a successful book discussion. I designed this step-by-step guide to provide teachers, librarians, and other concerned adults with the necessary how-to information for leading engaging and informal book discussions.

Part I, “15 Easy Steps to Creating Lively Book Discussions” examines the essential preparation and explores the benefits for both leaders and participants. It offers ways to

- Select the best books for sparking animated discussions.
- Come up with ideas to create provocative questions—complete with examples.
- Use online resources for enhancing and preparing for book discussions – with a listing of complementary online discussion venues.
- Learn how a group selects a book.
- Establish rules.
- Manage books discussions
- Increase the number of boys participating.

Part II, “50 Field-Tested Teen Book Discussion Guides,” features ready-made reading group guides with insightful comments and provocative questions. Each guide includes the basic bibliographic information, a list of themes, the genre, the names and ages of the main characters, and general tips for presenting the book. Next is a summary of the book, a set of questions, and analyses of suggested discussion points.

I trust the guides will be a valuable resource to every discussion leader, from novice to veteran. The summaries and comments will help teachers and librarians

find the right books to complement their curricula and focus on issues that will interest the group. Following the guides are the author, title, and theme indexes for easy reference.

I have selected a variety of YA books from different genres featuring protagonists from various backgrounds. They all address issues that affect the lives of teenagers or are of special interest to teens; they have all been successfully “fieldtested” in real-life groups.

The guides are enhanced by the experiences of the librarians and teachers who replied to a survey I posted on the YALSA-BK listserv and by those with whom I spoke in person or by phone.

It is my hope that the resources in Teen Book Discussion Groups @ the Library will help novice leaders take the beginning plunge and help veterans to discover new inspiration.

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I am grateful to all the librarians and teachers who graciously responded to my survey and to those who took the time to talk with me in person or on the phone. I am also grateful to the many teens who have shared their opinions, fears, and dreams during book discussions.

My thanks to Joel Shoemaker, who helped me shape my proposal, and to my editor, Michael Kelley, for helping me develop a sense of order in my book and for keeping me smiling with his sense of humor.

