Q & A: Successful BookTalking
by Dr. Kimberly Tyson @tysenkimberly

Q: What is a BookTalk?
A: A BookTalk is...
   a formal or informal talk about a book ranging in length from 30 seconds to 5 minutes
   - FlashTalks: 30 – 90 seconds  
   - ShortTalks: 2 – 3 minutes  
   - LongTalks: 4 – 5 minutes
   • an intriguing, inviting peek into the book, for the purpose of provoking the listener’s interest and curiosity about the book.
   • a “commercial” for the book, designed to entice the listener to read the book. An effective booktalk answers the question: Why do I want to spend time reading the book?
   • not a read aloud, book review, or book report. It does not evaluate the quality of the book, analyze the book’s content, or tell the ending.

Q: Why Take the Time for BookTalks?
A: Because BookTalks...
   • promote increased independent reading.
   • introduce interesting books and authors to students who might not find the books on their own.
   • facilitate reading engagement, as they introduce students to books they will want to read and will choose to read voluntarily.
   • are powerful reading motivators that create an enthusiasm for reading.
   • are enjoyable for all age levels; however, BookTalking is most appropriate for students in grades 2 – 12, as they have developed the ability to read books independently.

Q: When is BookTalking appropriate?
A: BookTalks...
   • can be done anytime.
   • should be done daily and weekly across the school year.
   • are appropriate for individuals, as well as small and large groups.

Q: What are the unbreakable rules of BookTalking?
A: Do not BookTalk...
   • a book you have not read or are not familiar with.
   • a book you don’t like.
   • a book that is developmentally inappropriate in terms of reading level, maturity level, language, theme or topic. (Be aware of your audience.)
   • the ending of the book. Leave the audience in suspense!
Q: What are the types of BookTalks?
A: There are many types. Among them are...

Plot Summary
- The plot summary is the most common type of BookTalk and involves summarizing the plot up to a climatic point and then stopping. The trick is to make the listener want to know what happens next. To create suspense, tell enough of the story to interest the audience without revealing too much of the plot.

Character Description
- In the character description BookTalk, a main character is the focus of the BookTalk, and the present either becomes that character, speaking in the first person as if he or she were the character, or describes the main character in detail.

Episode or Anecdote
- In this type of BookTalk, a scene or an anecdote from the book is chosen for retelling or for reading aloud.

Mood-based
- During the mood-based BookTalk, the presenter uses specific quotes from the story, the author’s language, or visual or auditory props to capture a unique writing style, tone, or atmosphere of the book. The mood-based BookTalk is often used in combination with other types of BookTalks.

Theme, Author, or Genre
- The theme, author, or genre BookTalk showcases several titles sharing a unifying element. The individual BookTalks included may follow any of the formats previously described.

Q: How do you prepare for a BookTalk?
A: There are many things you can do such as...

- Read! Read! Read! Read a lot!
- Take notes as you read – author, title, main characters, plot, and specific scenes that you may want to refer to.
- Determine the number of books you want to BookTalk. About 8 to 10 books at one time works well for older audiences.
- Choose books that appeal to your audience – boys, girls, or both!
- You may choose not to BookTalk books they will read on their own.

Q: How do you present a BookTalk?
A: Here are a few tips that will help it be successful!

- Practice! Practice! Practice!
- Learn the BookTalk, but don’t memorize it word for word.
- Use your voice and tone to convey emotion and interest: enthusiasm, drama, and humor.

© 2013. Learning Unlimited LLC.
Remember to speak clearly and slowly enough to be understood.
Maintain eye contact with the audience.
Always have the book with you and show it during the BookTalk.
Provide your audience with a written list of the books you have BookTalked, so they can find them later.
Start with a surefire hit as an ice-breaker and end with a really exciting book!
Relax and enjoy yourself! Have fun with BookTalking.

Q: Are there any more tips to help BookTalks be successful?
A: Here are a few things I’ve learned, that include...

- Props. They’re fun and effective; just use them sparingly.
- Always including the title and author of the book as part of the BookTalk.
- Encourage your audience to participate by asking questions to set the stage for the book you are about to BookTalk or by repeating the title of the book. After the BookTalk, don’t answer questions about the book, point them to read the book!
- Vary the mood of your talks – include funny, mysterious, scary, and touching books.
- Link the book to a popular movie with a similar theme or setting or to a situation or person in the news.
- Encourage and invite your students to do BookTalks!

Q: Are there resources that I should be aware of?
A: There are numerous resources that can guide you. These are a few of the best.

- Nancy Keane’s BookTalks – Quick and Simple http://nancykeane.com/booktalks
- Booktalking Basics www.albany.edu/%7edj2930/aboutbt.html
- Scholastic BookTalks http://www.scholastic.com/librarians/ab/booktalks.htm
- Digital BookTalks http://digitalbooktalk.com/

Adapted from Linda Cornwell’s BookTalk Information

© 2013. Learning Unlimited LLC.