

Ignite a Lifelong Love of Learning: Create an intergenerational book club in your library learning commons and invite your community to explore the diverse world of the human experience

by Lisa Lewis

The Idea

The idea for an intergenerational book club had been simmering for a while and I was waiting for the right moment to launch the initiative. Memories of the book club I belonged to 20 years ago were potent because of the sense of community and literature I was introduced to by the group's voracious readers. I cherished our monthly discussions that instilled a deep sense of warmth and camaraderie which led to luxuriously rich dialogue about each book. I wanted to infuse the foundations for my adult/child book club with similar feelings for the participants.

When I changed schools in September 2017, I knew immediately the opportunity to initiate a club had presented itself. After six outstanding years as a teacher-librarian at a French Immersion School in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), I wanted a professional change. To accomplish that, I interviewed for a classroom position and returned to a grade 4 class in a portable classroom for a remarkable year. In that portable, my students and I were as far as one could possibly be from the Library Learning Commons (LLC) and our class library was minimal. Right away, I compiled a list of books I wished my school's teacher-librarian would purchase and brainstormed how the adult/child book club would come to life. As many teacher-librarians know, these positions are scarce yet I knew one day I would find a path back to the LLC. What I did not know at the time I accepted the position was how quickly this would occur. Within a year, I was back in the LLC, where I continued with the book club, partnered with colleagues, vigorously promoted unbelievable virtual resources and managed a complete re-design of the LLC due to fundraising efforts by the parent council. Since I was also a Digital Lead Learner (DLL) being back in the LLC was an excellent fit and I expanded the book club's reach to the entire junior division.

Goals

Nurturing a lasting love of reading was another driving force for the book club. Other goals I envisioned were the creation of a community of readers across generations, introducing and modelling reading comprehension skills such as making connections and inferring, and curating a list of books written by Canadian authors that highlighted the diversity of the human experience. Promoting Canadian literature and its breadth and depth is vital and the book club was an ideal vehicle to accomplish this. As well, by

hosting the book club in the LLC, the adults discovered that the LLC is a place for participatory learning where the entire school community congregates to discuss, to wonder, to research, to create and to innovate. It was indeed a pleasure to jumpstart the adults' realization that the LLC they grew up with has organically morphed into a hub to support 21st Century learning. Along the journey, I purposely discussed other critical goals of the LLC such as global competencies, responsible technology integration, and the inquiry process. The adults, along with their children, delved into the robust lives of the books' characters and experienced situations that were poignant, emotional and stirring. This face-to-face encounter resonated with the participants and underscored how vital it is to take time to speak about books and the journeys readers embark upon. Literature connects people to communities, both local and global, where stories have the capability to captivate us in a myriad of ways. The power of reading together is both immense and intimate. There was a gentle synergy in the room when participants considered other's opinions and feelings. Research about the effects of reading aloud to young children confirms the extensive benefits of a child's cognitive development. According to *Reading to Young Children: A Head-Start in Life* (Kalb and van Ours, 2012) "there is an important role for parents in the development and educational performance of their children" and "parental reading to children increases the child's reading and other cognitive skills at least up to the age of 10-11." This book club supports cognitive, social and emotional development through the discourse, the decision of the adult to commit to participating and the reading of the books.

I would be remiss if I did not speak about another goal which was to foster an environment whereby the participants had an opportunity for meaningful conversation about a book's characters, challenges and big ideas that is uninterrupted by technology. I absolutely adore technology and have presented at a variety of events including the TDSB Unleashing Learning Conference, TDSB Google Camp and the Ontario Library Association (OLA) Super Conference about extensive collaborations with teachers designed to enhance students' skills and competencies through the responsible use of technology. The value of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) is promoted through my school's collection and activities I construct for the students, teachers and parents. I do believe that "A" (Art) should be added so that STEM is re-imagined as STEAM since artistic creation fits naturally with these other disciplines. Perhaps another "E" (Empathy) should be included as well to emphasize human connection, sustainability and the concept of universal design. Often, I host lunch and learn sessions to introduce engaging and easy to use technologies and I participate regularly in staff meetings to demonstrate technology and highlight the TDSB virtual resources. For this club, I envisioned a place that enabled the child and adult voice to be the focal point. In this quiet space, the participants feel calm and are keen to share. As one

mother shared, a few years ago, “this book club levels the field between child and parent.”

Communication

Promoting the book club is essential to its success and information is distributed in multiple ways during the school year. A few key ways to disseminate information is via the principal's weekly e-newsletter and junior teacher's weekly communications. At the beginning of the year, I create a poster using Google Docs and include it in the school's e-newsletter on a regular basis. I write blurbs about the book club two weeks before to remind the community and share that along with the poster to all grade 4, 5 and 6 teachers so they too can remind the parents. Posters are hung in the school and when meeting with classes I provide an overview of the book club. Now that I have been at the school for two and a half years, I know many families and speak with them about the initiative any chance I have. Teachers are extremely busy so I make it easy for them to share my information and give them ample notice to include the poster and blurb. Social media is an excellent tool for communicating about the club. I Tweet using the hashtags #kidlit and #IReadCanadian, include the author's and publisher's Twitter account and post on Instagram.

Curating Books

Books must be written by Canadians. Many are award winners and/or nominated for awards across the country and a few have been nominated in the United States. It is tough to choose the books. I search for literature that delves into challenging issues such as war, medical issues, homelessness, and divorce that take place in different parts of the world (e.g. Uganda), and whose main characters are diverse. Recently I read the memoir Birds Art Life: A Year of Observation (Maclear, 2017) and could not stop thinking about this passage: “I began thinking about ‘spark books’. It occurred to me that most ardent readers would be able to pinpoint the book that ignited their love of reading” (Maclear, 2017, p. 115). Maclear continued by writing “she had spoken to a few friends who “without exception” recalled a book read during childhood”. To borrow Maclear's words, the books must potentially be “spark books” for students and their families. Books must have the ability to ignite questions, empathy, advocacy and critical thinking. I also want to showcase the impressive variety of literature that is published for school age children to the adults in my community. It is quite different from their childhood.

Choosing Book Club Dates

Since book club occurs after school, I switched up the days of the week to be respectful of the children's after school commitments. This information is highlighted when promoting the book club.

Books Must Be Easy To Source

While choosing books, I pick material available at public libraries, the school's LLC or in bookstores. People are busy and material must be easy to source.

RSVP for Book Club

Reminders are sent in the school's e-newsletter with my email address and I create brief reminders for teachers to include in their communication process. Teachers are inundated and I need to make it easy for them to promote the book club.

Oral Communication Skills Improvement

I post sentence starters that I model and encourage the children to use when commenting. This adds a level of complexity to their speaking. Often, some adults would incorporate them into their commentary. What is clear is that the adults appreciate the high-level conversations their children are engaging in. A few examples of sentence starters are: "This reminds me of....", "The part of the book that startled me, that confused me.....", "I really liked your comment because..." and "Thank you for your comment but I would like to disagree because....". These prompts support students' oral communication skills and it is my intention that in time these phrases will become part of their vernacular.

Day of Set-Up

The children who participate assist in arranging the chairs into a giant circle and ensure there is enough space for snacks. The students are always so excited and anticipation for book club begins during the afternoon. The children could not wait for their adult's (father, grandparent, caregiver) arrival. They wrote a nametag for their adult and placed it on the chair next to their place. The name tags were useful during conversations. The students know each other well but many of the adults do not know the others.

Food

A few days before book club, I email attendees letting them know the number of participants so they can bring an appropriate amount of nut-free snacks. This means there is always enough. I always asked for healthy and easy to serve items. This makes set-up and clean-up much easier, especially for the custodial staff.

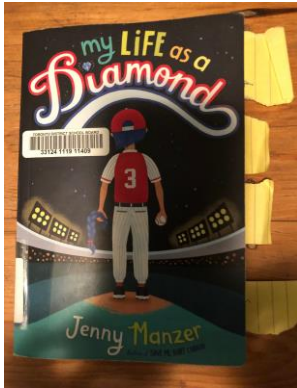
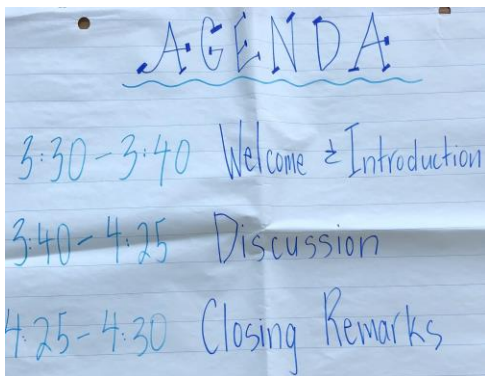


Figure 1: My Life As A Diamond With post-it notes

While reading, I use Post-it notes to jot down reflections, highlight a quote, or, use as a reminder to return to a certain page to re-read, develop a discussion question etc. I show the participants what I do because this is something the child or parent can easily use.

Figure 2: Book Club Agenda

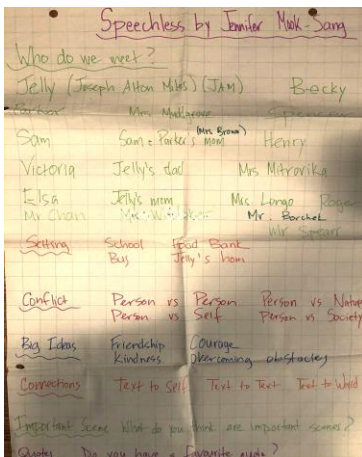
An agenda is compiled for each book club to ensure participants are aware of the process. The agenda provides students with an opportunity to learn how meetings are



conducted in many professional organizations and it enables the adults to know what to expect. The adults appreciate that their children are being introduced to the concept of a meeting agenda. This tool adds an air of sophistication. When one father told me book club exceeded his expectations I was thrilled and humbled. I always begin the club with a “welcome message” that is followed by a review of the agenda. I explain about the background chart (Figure 3) and add that I will facilitate throughout book club to ensure everyone has the

chance to speak, to make sure comments are not too lengthy and to keep the conversation flowing. Conversation flow was never a problem. In reality, one hour was not enough time.

Figure 3: Background Chart



In case a few people have not finished the book, it is important they are able to maximize the experience. To accomplish this, I create charts with information that can be referenced during book club. I used the charts as well to refer to quotes, when talking about characters and for support about items I might not remember since I read the book far in advance. Information includes a list of characters, big ideas, types of connections readers could make, and quotes. In communications leading up to book club, I invite readers to jot down questions, thoughts, quotes or a passage and bring those to share.

Figure 4: Book Club Poster

Promoting the book club is critical to its success. The notice goes into the school e-newsletter, junior teachers include it in their parent communications, the library club promotes it and the poster can be found throughout school. The document contains links for author websites when available and can be shared electronically, printed or copied. Parents find this helpful.

Rosedale Child/Adult Book Club 2017-18 Portable 1

Please join us on a magical journey as we delve into the lives of young children who encounter child situations. Be ready to share what you remember about these books during the winter and spring of 2 any adult you would like (i.e., parent, aunt, grandparent, caregiver). The only requirement is that the reads the book with you. Book club begins at 3:30 and lasts one hour and takes place in Portable 1

Our book club includes nibbles (not-free) and drinks. A reminder will be sent one week before each so that I know who is attending and am able to set up the classroom properly. If you are unable to a your child is please email me who is picking your child up at 4:30 in front of the portable.

It is your responsibility to borrow the book from the library or purchase it.

This will be a fantastic adventure for all of us. Thanks for joining us.

Book	Date	Link
Undergrounders by David Skuy	Wed, January 24	David Skuy website
Mazy McMillan and the Rainbow Goddess by Shari Green	Thurs, February 22	Shari Green website
Prove It, Josh by Jerry Watson	Tues, March 27	Jerry Watson
Speechless by Jennifer Mook-Song	Fri, April 20	Author Website
Fifty Legs: a true story by Chrissy Jordan-Fenton	Wed, May 23	Toronto Public Library
The Breadwinner by Deborah Ellis	Mon, June 18	Deborah Ellis website

The Ontario Library Association facilitates a reading program called the Forest of Reading. The club geared towards students in grades 3 - 6 are Silver Birch Fiction, Silver Birch Express and Silver Birch Non-fiction. Take a look at their website for additional information. The website has links to books in in past years. I have read many and am happy to share my thoughts. Forest of Reading Program

Other Books Considered for the Book Club

Number the Stars by Lois Lowry	Scholastic
One Year in God Harbour by Polly Horvath	Toronto Public Library
I am a Taxi by Deborah Ellis	Deborah Ellis website
Ultra by David Carroll	Scholastic
Striker by David Skuy	David Skuy

Figure 5: Book Club Quotes on "Speechless"

This is another chart created for the book club. I really like to begin the discussion with a quote and feel this helps the conversation to flow. Sometimes the quotes I include are ones that a few readers wanted to share.

Quotes

p. 91 "That was cool the way Kayla could say what was in her mind without worrying about what other people would think!" Jelly

p. 51 "Too much drama!" Sam

p. 118 "Life is complicated!" Jelly

p. 129 "And I finally realized that it wasn't Victoria who prevented me from giving that speech. It was me, for believing her when she made fun of me, for letting her tell me who I was. I sat down for a while and thought not about speeches, but about the kind of person I wanted to be. It was time for a fresh start!" Jelly

p. 149 "She could do better if she worked harder." Victoria's dad

Speechless

Figure 6: Prep Notes Done For Each Book

This is what I do while reading the book. I use it to create the charts for each book and it helps me formulate some of my discussion remarks. This document is helpful when I speak with teachers about novels for read alouds or literature circles/study. This document provides a glimpse into the book's story.

Mined by Natalie Hyde Book Club Notes

Characters

Chris Deary
 Fiona Stuckless (daughter of one of the swindlers, Jonah Stuckless. He swindled Wally Deary, Chris' grandfather). Owns Bull and Brambles. Drives the Ducati.
 Randy - snooping for info about the gold, pickpocket
 Family Service - Mrs. Ledbetter
 Uncle Vinny - p. 123 (brother of Shard's mom)
 Neils and Anna
 Mrs. Olsen - Family Services in Dawson

Quotes

P.2 "Nobody good ever pounded on the door."
 P.11 "If the Dearys didn't have bad luck, they'd have no luck at all!"
 P.12 "because there is no room for an honest man down at the docks."
 P.14 "Maybe the people inside like to feel like they're hidden away."
 P.33 "Why didn't he fight for what was his?"
 P.78 "My dad and I were sinking here, like we were caught in quicksand."
 P.84 "I didn't want him to think he was being abandoned. I knew how that felt."
 P.85 "I was surprised that that hurt more than not having a home anymore" (saying bye to Shard)
 P.106 Living in a dumpsy apartment and wearing clothes from charity stores doesn't usually get you admiring looks. I felt on top of the world. (getting on the Ducati at the restaurant on the road)
 P.113 "No reception. Of course not. Why would anything go right today?" Fiona
 P.133 "I didn't want to tell her that was what my whole life was like." Chris
 P.115 Dad yelled at me to stop asking, that she was never coming back because he was a lousy drunk.
 P.146 "It felt like icy cold fingers were clawing down our back."
 P.150 "In our world, you do whatever, you have to survive."
 P.185 A snake helping a piranha. Randy was talking with a Family Services Caseworker in Dawson
 P.188 "You know how sometimes you get a lightbulb moment and everything clicks into place? This was one of those times." Chris
 P.190 "He'd be shaking too, if he knew how close I'd come to being busted right then." Chris
 P.205 "No, I am not running away. I am running to," I said.
 P.229 Fiona registered the claim under Francis Dreary. "Yes, but she's not her dad." Neils

Chapter Titles

Pickles, Cheese + Pantyhose - doing Fiona's shopping for her relatives
 A Sweet Ride - Fiona's Ducati was in the 'shed'

Big Ideas

Poverty
 Losing a parent
 Homelessness
 Alcohol
 Mining
 Location line

Conclusion

The book club has the ability to anchor a community and reinforce the ability of the LLC to be the hub of the school and community especially in schools that might be in locations that have limited social infrastructure and resources. Its inclusive nature means that anyone can participate. At times some of the adults had not read the book and a few of the students had not finished it. These individuals were there because they wanted to be part of this activity.

A recent information brief by School Library Journal (SLJ Staff, 2019), says “school librarians’ contributions, whether direct or indirect, are consistently shown to be of positive value to not only students and teachers, but the wider school community,” and that “It is important to consider the sustainability of school libraries for the success of all students in New York as well as across the country for generations to come, because school libraries and the role of school librarians have and will continue to evolve to meet the conditions of the world and time in which they exist.” I concur with these statements and truly believe that the LLC has an immense responsibility to the school and community-at-large to provide a safe and positive environment where people can flourish. The hour allotted to the book club was simply not long enough. The feeling of 30 people participating in a conversation, often about challenging circumstances, was mesmerizing, and when it was time to end nobody wanted to go. The book club is a program that can be easily replicated across the country in school and public libraries, in community centers and in people’s homes. There are endless opportunities to tweak the format, to incorporate technology such as using clips to record book reviews that can be shared with the community, and to schedule times and/or frequency that are more convenient for your population. I hope you are inspired to initiate a similar venture.

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