

Lighting the Fire

Facilitating Great Book Discussions



So you will facilitate this book discussion...

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Where did the program theme come from?

Who selected (or will select) the book?

- Institutional initiative?
- Management?
- Patrons?
- Is it your idea?

What defines success for a book discussion in your library?

Preparation Begins NOW!

If I have a chance to help select the book, I read all the candidate titles before the selection meeting!

If the title has been selected for me, I read it as soon as I know about the program!

I want to establish a team to help with program promotion, space reservation, food or catering, etc. - the team should enable me to focus on facilitation.

About that book.....

There are *good* books for book discussions, and there are *BETTER* books for book discussions.

Any book can be discussed in a group!

Facilitators who find a book's *appeal* have lively discussions on their hands!
Finding appeal is a learned skill.

Readers' Advisory to the Rescue!

Readers' Advisory service librarians talk about “appeal factors” in recommending books to patrons. Joyce Saricks mentions five:

1. ***Pacing*** (examples: fast, slow, measured, densely written?)
2. ***Characterization*** (examples: single or multiple POV, do readers identify with characters, do they develop or are they stereotypes?)
3. ***Story Line*** (examples: action or psychological, focus on people or events, are there multiple levels?)
4. ***Frame*** (examples: is background/scene developed or ignored, how does background affect characters/tone/atmosphere?)
5. ***Style*** (examples: colorful, thoughtful, unpretentious, poetic)

Booktalk your Book Discussion!

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A booktalk is the five-minute account of a book that I would give to spark interest in a book - think a quick “elevator speech” to a colleague!

- Focus not on plot specifics but on overall arc of the book.
- Talk in terms of appeal factors to whet the listeners’ appetites for more!
- Intentionally leave gaps for discovery.

Preparing a booktalk helps me to think through appeal for the discussion participants. It also gives me material to use if a discussion lags.

Engage the Senses!

A picture can be worth a thousand words.

So can a cookie, or a snack that helps tell the story.

These “non-literary” cues can spark participants’ memories of the reading experience and promote more lively discussions.



From Blog “a year of wisdom,” 11 May 2011, <http://365devotions.blogspot.com/2011/05/arent-you-sharp-cookie.html>

Discussion Dynamics

I try to get the ball rolling, then ask questions of participants to keep them talking about the book.

Some patrons come just to listen, but more have something to say. I want to be a model listener, and not worry about getting any particular message out about the book.

Keep the discussion respectful of all participants; I may not agree with someone's opinion about a character, but I respect their right to express it.