

# **The Teen-Centered Book Club: Readers into Leaders**

*Bonnie Kunzel  
Constance Hardesty*

**LIBRARIES UNLIMITED**

**THE TEEN-CENTERED  
BOOK CLUB**

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# THE TEEN-CENTERED BOOK CLUB



## *Readers into Leaders*

Bonnie Kunzel and Constance Hardesty

Libraries Unlimited Professional Guides for Young Adult Librarians Series  
C. Allen Nichols and Mary Anne Nichols, Series Editors



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*For my mother, who let me go to the library as often as I liked  
(and read my books), and for my father, who let me read the part of  
the Wall in family renditions of A Midsummer Night's Dream. —CH*



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# SERIES FOREWORD

We firmly believe in young adult library services and advocate for teens whenever we can. We are proud of our association with Libraries Unlimited and Greenwood Publishing Group and grateful for their acknowledgment of the need for additional resources for teen-serving librarians. We intend for this series to fill those needs, providing useful and practical handbooks for library staff. Readers will find some theory and philosophical musings, but for the most part, this series will focus on real-life library issues with answers and suggestions for front-line librarians.

Our passion for young adult librarian services continues to reach new peaks. As we travel to present workshops on the various facets of working with teens in public libraries, we are encouraged by the desire of librarians everywhere to learn what they can do in their libraries to make teens welcome. This is a positive sign since too often libraries choose to ignore this underserved group of patrons. We hope you find this series to be a useful tool in fostering your own enthusiasm for teens.

Mary Anne Nichols  
C. Allen Nichols  
*Series Editors*



# PREFACE

*Teen-centered book clubs are grounded in the admittedly radical idea that the clubs are not primarily about library programming or even about books (!) but are all about teens. Books are the medium, the club is the method, and the goal is aiding teens in their quest for identity, meaning, and connection.*

Two things set this book apart from the typical book club guide. First, it's written for librarians present and future, in public libraries and schools. It specifically addresses libraries' unique requirements: budgeting, impact on the facility and collection, censorship, and public support, to name just a few.

More important, it's the only guide that puts front and center the idea that book clubs for teens are *not* scaled-back versions of adult clubs.

What's the difference? Book clubs for adults are social clubs that connect readers with literature. Teen book clubs are social clubs that connect teens with other people—directly in club meetings or vicariously through books.

## **READERS INTO LEADERS . . . TOMORROW AND TODAY**

We absolutely believe that teen-centered book clubs speak directly to teens' nearly existential craving for identity, meaning, and connection. We just as passionately believe that the benefits swing back around, that teens' kaleidoscopic perspectives and skewery thought-paths enrich the library in ways that go to the heart of libraries' reason for being.

It's all too easy to see teens as future parents, taxpayers, business leaders, or politicians. But our services to them are more than investments against the future. They're investments in teens' present tense. Reading books together helps us understand ourselves and connect to others. Through literature, we experience life more richly. As we explore many different answers to "Why are we

here?” we think more broadly about our own lives and purpose. Teens deserve all that, for their here and now as well as for their sometime-future.

Add to that a focus on coming together to create new understanding and to get work done, and we get to the heart of teens’ craving for meaning, for bringing their visions and dreams to life. That’s the leadership dimension of book club. That’s what transforms readers into leaders.

And if by doing all that we create raving fans, that’s OK, too.

We wrote this book out of our affection for this persnickety, creative, spontaneous, exasperating, self-absorbed, and fickle Generation Whatever. We wrote it to make a real difference for them and for you—and for parents and teachers and authors and publishers and booksellers and future generations and, well, everyone, everywhere, everywhen.

That’s no overstatement. When teens connect to literature, they connect to humanity. That connection sets the bells in their hearts to ringing. When you’re in book club with teens, the sounds you hear are our best, brightest hopes ringing in their own futures. Your teen book club can be the place where that happens. This book can help.

## **The Lab Coat in the Library**

The past 20 years have seen a surge of interest in young adults, particularly middle schoolers aged 11–13 years. We know more about their brain chemistry, physical mutations, social proclivities, and developmental needs than ever before. Much of what we know relates to their academic development. And that’s a bad thing, because academic development is not the purpose for a teen book club (except when it is: see chapters 4 and 5).

Still, all that research helps us understand teens, and understanding points us in a direction. We can take the general truths of research, immerse them in the crucible of our firsthand experience, and develop useful ideas about what really works.

And that’s what you’ll find in this practical guide. In every chapter you’ll find guidelines, practical tips, and suggestions for building and sustaining a teen-centered book club in your school or public library.

## **WHAT THIS BOOK IS—AND IS NOT**

This book is a guide for adults who work with teens in library settings and want to promote, facilitate, and help maintain a book group in whatever form it takes. Though we do suggest great reads, intriguing discussion questions, and engaging activities, this is not a one-size-fits-all “cookbook” with predefined expectations and outcomes.

## **How to Use This Book**

Take it straight from front to back or dip into whatever speaks to your heart or your immediate crisis. Every chapter is packed with ideas and tips you can use to build a club from the ground up or to make a good club even better. With

detailed contents and index, it's a useful reference for troubleshooting and problem solving.

## **WHERE TO GO FROM HERE**

Running a book club well doesn't mean you never have problems; it means that when you do have problems, you recognize and fix them. Your fixes may not look exactly like ours. You can certainly try what we suggest; the ideas are tried and true. But if they don't work, bend them, shape them, cut and paste them together. Then let us know what works for you, and we'll include it in our next edition!

It's all about process. Book club never is; it's always becoming.

## **HOW TO CONTACT US**

Please, tell us about your book clubs! What works? What doesn't? What's fun? How did you solve a problem? What is your greatest success? Your greatest fiasco? Send us your stories, questions, ideas, observations, projects, and—yes—photos! You can email Constance at an address created for this purpose, [chardesty2@yahoo.com](mailto:chardesty2@yahoo.com).



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Many, many thanks to the American Library Association, for safeguarding and strengthening a most valuable national treasure.