

Book Clubbing!

Carol Littlejohn

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Book Clubbing!

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Book Clubbing!

Successful Book Clubs
for Young People

Carol Littlejohn

 LINWORTH

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This book is dedicated to all “my” book clubbers, especially Sarah Bastone, Michael Mann, and Marissa Helides.

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Finally, this book is dedicated to my parents, Dr. Frank Thomas (1921–2008) and Mary Veach Thomas (1921–1997).

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About the Author

Photo by Claire Presnell.



CAROL LITTLEJOHN is coauthor (with Cathlyn Thomas) of the *Talk That Book* series, vols. 1–4 (Worthington, OH: Linworth, 1998–2004). Her 20-year experience as a public and school librarian has taken her from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to Johannesburg, South Africa. Check out her reading Web site at www.carollittlejohn.com.

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Reading Activities Matrix

All ages can participate in these suggested reading activities. However, this matrix recommends the most successful activities by grade. For further information on each activity, see chapter 5, “Reading Activities: The Fun Begins.”

	Pre-K	Kdg.	Gr. 1-3	Gr. 4-6	Gr. 7-9	Gr. 10+
Arts and Crafts	X	X	X	X	X	X
Authors, Authors!		X	X	X	X	X
Battle of the Books				X	X	X
Book Exchange			X	X	X	X
Book Trailers			X	X	X	X
Creative Dramatics	X	X	X	X	X	X
Field Trips	X	X	X	X	X	X
Guest Speakers	X	X	X	X	X	X
Mystery Games		X	X	X	X	X
One-Minute Booktalks	X	X	X	X	X	X
Poster Contest	X	X	X	X	X	X
Puppet Show				X	X	X
Rapping Rhymes	X	X	X	X	X	X
Read-Aloud Books	X	X	X			
Reader’s Theater				X	X	X
Reading Games	X	X	X	X		
ScrapBooking			X	X	X	X
Soap Opera					X	X
Storytelling	X	X	X	X	X	X
Talent Show	X	X	X	X	X	X
Trial by Jury			X	X	X	X
Young Authors and Illustrators	X	X	X	X	X	X

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Introduction

Why book clubbing? How is a youth book club different from an adult book club? Can book clubs create lifelong readers?

This book is different from most books on book clubs. Instead of focusing on a group-read (a group reading one selected book), I address other successful methods of running a book club. These methods come from my experiences, as well as those of other adult sponsors who lead book clubs that give students reading choices with fun reading activities.

I began sponsoring a book club in 2000 with two Reading teachers, Deborah Beresik and Desiree Rotundo. Our middle school (grades 6–8) was located outside Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. We sponsored young adults, ages 11–14, for 45 minutes weekly during an Activity Period. Our group had about 30 students with a wide variety of reading skills and interests. At first we tried Reader’s Theater—a triumph. Next we resorted to the tried-and-true group-read—not so successful. The group’s interest dwindled until we all agreed on another reading activity.

After this experience, choice became a vital ingredient in all the activities we did. Thereafter, each book club morphed into a self-sufficient unit led by the students, and our job was to initiate their democratic wishes: field trips, mystery games, guest speakers, shared booktalks, and storytelling.

Success! Two years later, I had to divide the book club into three groups because of expanding membership, but we came together for our annual field trip. As different and varied as each of the groups became, all members wanted activities to accompany each meeting. That was an aha moment. Could a book club be that flexible?

As I discovered, a flexible book club requires a multitude of reading activities. Preceding this introduction is a Reading Activities Matrix that provides suggested activities for each grade. More specific details are provided in chapter 5. Reading activities usually occur at the end of the meeting. However, a successful book club requires more than just fun reading activities.

Chapter 1, “Just the Facts,” provides research on reading by educators like Harvey Daniels and Stephen Krashen that encourages more choice in reading. Valuable reading research has been studied and analyzed since 1937, and we can apply the successful strategies these studies suggest.

Chapter 2, “Back to Our (Book) Sponsors,” discusses the adult leaders, or what I call sponsors. It helps to know the latest research, but I think the real experts are the sponsors. Generally, sponsors don’t conduct research studies or write articles, and yet their ideas are usually practical and reliable. This chapter gives practical tips and advice from the sponsors based on their practical experiences.

Chapter 3, “Make It Work! The Place Setting,” analyzes the environmental setting. Where is the book club? Is the setting private or open? Can the members bring their lunch or snacks to the setting? What media, if any, are available? The setting has so much to do with the activities. Whatever the setting, the sponsor must make the space work.

Chapter 4, “The Book Clubbers: Let’s Go Clubbing!,” deals with the participants, or what I call the book clubbers. They are the main ingredients of a successful book club. In this chapter, book clubbers give helpful opinions. What did they like about the book club? What did they dislike? This chapter also discusses using a *Reader’s Profile* for preteens and teens that is distributed at the first meeting. These anonymous profiles are collected by the sponsor and analyzed with the group at the next meeting. From the second meeting, the book club takes its direction from the students.

As noted earlier, chapter 5, “Reading Activities: The Fun Begins,” provides you with an alphabetical listing of reading activities for all ages.

Chapter 6, “Cover to Cover: Recommended Group-Reads,” provides suggestions for a *group-read*, in which one book is selected for a group. Although we never tried a group-read again, I think that these titles might have worked, especially if your book club has a specific age, gender, or theme.

Chapter 7, “Talk That Book! Book Club Resources,” deals with media that recommend books for book clubs, including books, magazines, and Web sites.

The Appendices contain reproducible forms: “Battle of the Books” Timeline, Book Club Permission Slip, Guest Speaker Checklist, Permission Form for Field Trips, Publishing Permission Form, and Reader’s Profile.

Readers should feel free to browse and select the appropriate activities. Sometimes I refer the reader to a chapter because I’m assuming that the reader has not read the book chronologically. Therefore, please excuse any redundancy.

Finally, I hope this book will begin a discussion on engaging all kinds of readers in book clubs. Book clubs should include all readers, including students that are

- ◆ Learning English as a second language
- ◆ Attending special education classes
- ◆ Avoiding leisure reading

A group-read may not appeal to these reluctant readers because of the environmental similarity to a classroom. Instead, if the group democratically decides on its own book selection and reading activities, members are participating in student-led activities that may have long-term results.

I would enjoy hearing any ideas or suggestions from other book club sponsors (librarians, teachers, parents, and volunteers). I would also like to hear from book clubbers. Please share your ideas and experiences with me on my Web site. Also, for your convenience, I will put most of the Web sites I mention in this book on my Web site, including any updates.

In the meantime, let’s go book clubbing!

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