

## Let's Work Together Teaching Guide

Dear Teacher,

What I love about book clubs in the classroom is that students lead the discussion using outstanding stories and books that they choose. Besides, book clubs are an authentic literacy experience, mirroring the way adults gather to talk about books. You can schedule book clubs during one or two semesters, for they are part of the reading curriculum. Engage students by introducing them to a variation called Booked-for-Lunch Clubs. With this type of club, students eat and chat about their books during lunch (but always reserve time for them to have a recess and play). Book clubs work best when students have choices. Group members can discuss the same book or story or different books or stories around a genre such as biography or a common theme like *friendship*. Weaving book clubs into your curriculum allows you to foster students' ability to:

- Improve their critical thinking skills
- Cite text evidence to support ideas
- Create and discuss open-ended questions
- Be active listeners and respond to what their peers say
- Mentally organize and clarify responses before sharing

When you trust students to read and have meaningful conversations about their books, they develop an enthusiasm for these discussions. At the same time, they'll discover books that their peers enjoyed and consider reading them.

Laura Robb

Inspire Teaching  
and Learning with  
Outstanding Books.

## Book Clubs

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## GETTING STARTED WITH BOOK CLUBS

If book clubs are new to you, I suggest you organize them after the first semester—by then you'll know students' interests and strengths and have established trusting relationships with them. Students can practice meaningful conversations using "turn and talks" during your daily read alouds and small group instruction. When book clubs meet, attend one to two during a class as a listener. Always search for what worked well and jot notes about areas to work on, such as:

- Avoid interrupting a student who's talking
- Cite specific text evidence to support your thinking
- Respect valid ideas even when you don't agree with them
- Listen and respond to what a group member says
- Keep the discussion moving forward

You can invite groups to discuss one or two of these suggestions to figure out ways to make positive changes. Avoid telling students what to do. Instead, encourage them to find ways to solve these challenges on their own. Letting go of your control over discussions can be scary. However, even though you step aside, you can still support students and help them find success.

Before initiating book clubs, invite students to develop three to four behavior expectations that can make discussions productive and enjoyable. Note these on chart paper.

## GIVING STUDENTS CHOICE AND VOICE

Book clubs put students at the center, for they are in control of writing questions and using these to discuss their books. As you organize book clubs, you can provide students with choice and voice by having them:

- Choose their books
- Create their questions and select those for discussion
- Decide on the number of pages they'll read before meeting
- Decide on notebook writing
- Have input with assessments
- Lead debriefings to identify what worked and what needs to improve
- Set goals

When you give students voice and choice in their learning, you develop their independence and ability to be active listeners, and fine-tune their problem-solving abilities through debriefings and self-evaluations.

## TEACHING TIP:

If students' conversations are too loud or you hear students disrespecting a peer's idea, stop the book club discussion and ask students to explain why you stopped. Next, review the expectations that students developed as a reminder. If unproductive behaviors persist, stop the book clubs for that day and try again tomorrow.

## TEACHING TIP: AUTHORS IN YOUR CLASSROOM

When your students love reading an author's books, they often wish they could meet that person and chat. You can set up a Skype session between students and an author by visiting the publisher's website and contacting them—then watch students' enthusiasm for reading and book clubs soar!

## FINDING BOOKS

I like to keep a running list of books and series students suggest for book clubs and our class library. This way I can tap into their interests. With older students, have a chart titled “Books I Can’t Wait to Read” and invite students to write their choices on it. Here are three ways to find books:

- Raid your school’s book room
- Work with your school librarian if you have one or your public librarian
- Ask students for suggestions and order sample copies

Once you’ve selected several options for students, spread the books on a table and let students browse through them for twenty to thirty minutes. Encourage them to read the first chapter of a book they selected to make sure it’s a good fit—meaning that they can both read *and* enjoy it.

Students in a book club can discuss the same book, or they can each have a different book that relates to the same genre or theme. The point to remember is that it’s important for students to choose books they *want* to read.

Organize book clubs around the selections students make. Avoid large groups and keep membership to four or five students. This means you might have two groups reading the same book and that’s fine!

## TEACH STUDENTS TO ASK QUESTIONS

When students develop their own questions, they are more invested in the discussion. In addition, the questions you or an educational company creates might have little to do with students’ wonderings. Questions should be open-ended and have more than one answer that the text can support. Open-ended questions support analytical thinking and critical analysis.

Show students how you create and test open-ended questions by thinking aloud and making your process visible.

**If students read different books**, they can ask questions about literary elements, conflicts, themes, why characters or people change, or text structures like compare/contrast, cause/effect, and problem/solution.

**If students read the same books**, questions can be book specific. To craft open-ended questions, students can use words such as *why, how, evaluate, explain, compare/contrast, and offer reflections*. Students can also create questions using the suggestions included above for students reading different books.

## TEACHING TIP:

Most likely you’ll have a few students who aren’t enjoying the book they selected. It’s helpful to deal with this issue after students have read the first two to three chapters. Work with individuals and suggest they browse through books other groups are reading. If you have four to five students who need to switch books, let them preview several new titles that are enjoyable and easy to read, and then they can form a new group.

