

Teen Book Club: Resources on YA Fantasy Novels with Strong Female Characters

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Book club and teens

Looking to start a new book club for teens at your library? Book clubs are a great way to better promote recreational reading among adolescents. In her article, Heard (2015) outlines how she began a book club among teens at her school. When starting a new book club, a person should consider what books the club will read and how the meetings will be organized (Heard, 2015). Heard (2015) only reads the first book in a series with her book club, allowing them to finish the series on their own if the story piques their interest. If the goal of your book club is to promote recreational reading, it is important to make sure that the meetings are not like a teen's English class. Heard (2015) suggest making connections by using fun discussion questions, games, and activities to make reading fun. When selecting books for the book club, it is important to appeal to a broad range of readers by selecting a variety of genres with both female and male protagonists (Heard, 2015).

Don't have time to hold book club meetings? Wishing to appeal to teens who are seemingly ever online? As discussed by Scharbar (2009), an online book club for teens may be the answer. Scharbar (2009) describes online book clubs for teens and pre-teens as "fun, engaging, and convenient" and are viewed by both parents and librarians as "motivating and flexible" (p. 433). The examples that Scharbar looked at utilized 'Moodle', a free open-source software. This kind of book club utilizes forums for group discussion; librarians can also set up daily questions and polls. A real-time chat can be organized once a week where book club members arrange to be online at the same time to discuss the book. Scharbar (2009) concludes that internet-based book clubs capitalize on teens and their interests while complimenting reading practices.

Book Club Tips and Tricks

- Online book clubs are flexible and fun.
- Teens will read if the "book is a good read, if the book is accessible, and if they can have some ownership in the selection" (Lapp & Fisher, 2009, p. 559).
- Students often like reading "coming-of-age" novels as they relate to the content (Lapp & Fisher, 2009)

- Each book club meeting needs a moderator to ensure discussion flows well. The moderator could be a teacher, a librarian, or a student who will gain meaningful leadership experience. (Lapp & Fisher, 2009)
- Guidelines help book clubs run smoothly (Lapp & Fisher, 2009).
- Give teens a voice and responsibility in the book club – this gives them a chance to gain confidence in themselves and enjoy their time in the group.
- Food! The teenage years is a time of growth and teens are always hungry.

Appeal of fantasy books and strong female characters

Fantasy books are great for book clubs as there are a wide variety of stories. The first month teens could read a post-apocalyptic story and the next they could read a fantastical retelling of a beloved fairy tale. Fantasy is also a great break from the realistic fiction novels that they often read in classroom settings. Recently, there has been a trend of strong and well-written females in YA fantasy that will appeal to teenage girls in particular. Not only will young girls have characters that they relate and look up to, they may be inspired by reading about the adventures. Studies have shown that male readership is still high for fantasy books with female leads (Bethune, 2013).

Example of Discussion Questions and Activities

The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins

Questions:

1. Do you think that the author was inspired by reality television shows when she wrote the book? Which ones come to mind?
2. What are your predictions for the next book in the series?
3. Have you seen the movie adaptation? How does the movie compare to the book?

For more discussion questions, check out:

<https://www.readinggroupguides.com/reviews/the-hunger-games/guide>

Activity: “Students were broken up into groups and were given twelve cards, each showing a different item needed for survival. Working together, students had to prioritize the items from most important to least important and justify their answers” (Heard, 2015, p. 66).

Divergent by Veronica Roth.

Questions:

1. Which faction do you think you would be placed in?
2. Beatrice reinvents herself when she changes her name to 'Tris'. Why do you think she did this? If you had the chance to rename yourself, what would you change your name to?

For more discussion questions, check out: <https://www.litlovers.com/reading-guides/young-adult-fiction/9891-divergent-roth?start=3>

Activity: "Students came in and "joined" a faction by choosing to sit at particular tables marked with colors and symbols. Participants played a game called "Get to Know Your Faction" by deciding which faction a selection of famous people would belong to" (Heard, 2015 p.66).

Forget Tomorrow by Pintip Dunn.

Questions:

1. In the book, characters receive a vision from their future self to sculpt each individual into the person they are meant to be. Would you want a vision of your future self? Why or why not?
2. Do you think the future is 'set in stone' or do we create our own futures?

Activity: Create a number of funny future outcomes and then have the teens pick them out of a hat. Teens then must then come up with a creative story to tell the group how they got from their current self to their "future" self. For example, one could be the president of the world or Queen of Canada.

Last Thoughts on Teen Book Clubs

Instilling a love for reading as a teenager will help teens as they finish high school and enter university. Creating fun discussion questions will encourage teens to talk about the content of the book, even if they did not get a chance to read it. Furthermore, having fun activities will make teens look forward to your book club every month.

References

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