

Feature

Building a Student-Centred Book Club

When we first began book clubs at Guildford Grammar School, they were to be run after school during students' discretionary time, in particular at a time in the late afternoon when students could choose to go home (unlike lunch time book clubs). Because the clubs were to be run as enjoyable activities, we felt it was important to use different methods to those commonly utilised in in-class book discussion groups (eg literature circles etc), avoiding students perceiving them as 'work'. As the book clubs were to be run with adolescent boys, we felt it was important to avoid cultural perceptions of book clubs as middle aged women's activities. We decided to suggest a few models from which the boys could choose or encourage them to develop their own model.

The first step was to build relationships with readers who would hopefully then let other readers know that a book club run by the library would be worth trying. We informally approached students who borrowed recreational reading or who sat reading in the library and asked if they would be interested in a book club if one were set up. Once a small core of interested students was established, they were consulted about days and times that they thought would be popular. It quickly became apparent that two book clubs would be required, since senior and junior students had after school commitments on alternate days making a combined group very difficult to arrange. Once this initial building of interest and consulting with readers was complete posters, notices and visits to a few English classes were used to invite interested students to attend an initial meeting to plan how their book club would run. Initially students asked library staff what book club would involve; they were engaged when told that this would be entirely up to the membership to decide.

Discussion at the first meeting centred around:

- What to read
- How to engage in and manage discussion
- What other activities the club might be interested in
- How often to meet

We proposed the following options for consideration and invited any other suggestions.

What to read

For each book club we could:

- all read the same book (either by purchasing, hiring, borrowing from public libraries etc)
- all read works within a particular genre or by a particular author
- all read whatever we choose without regard for others' reading choices

Students opted to try each of these options and ultimately have chosen to rotate through them during the year.

How to engage in and manage discussion

Options offered included:

- face to face discussion in a group like a traditional book club
- online discussion
- discussion directed by the Teacher Librarian and Librarian working with the book club
- Teacher Librarian and Librarian provide questions to form the basis of discussion
- students take turns facilitating discussion

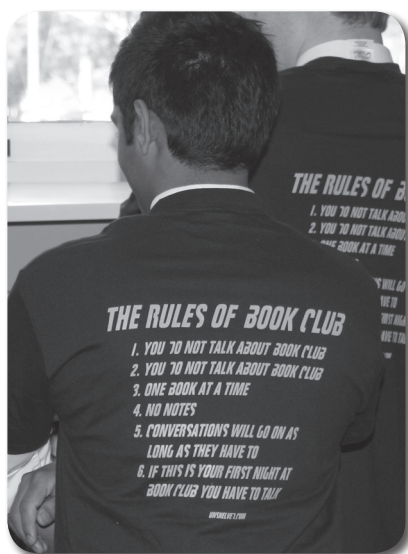
Surprisingly students were not interested in online discussion, choosing instead face to face discussion. They suggested that the

Teacher Librarian and Librarian should facilitate the first few meetings to give them an idea of how they might run and then they would take turns facilitating with staff providing them with assistance when necessary.

Other activities

Suggestions offered for students consideration included:

- online discussion and social cataloguing on LibraryThing
- bookcrossing
- attending author events
- reading books and viewing the film of the book for comparison
- meetings with other book clubs



Other activities were all taken up on a trial basis. Whilst some students enjoyed the social cataloguing aspect of LibraryThing they were uninterested in online discussion.

Meeting frequency

Students settled on fortnightly meetings and this decision has not been revisited, although students sometimes express a desire for weekly meetings. Overall this meeting roster works well for us as it gives all book club members (including staff) time to read but is frequent enough to maintain momentum and enthusiasm.

We also decided to provide afternoon tea for book club since meetings are after school when students would often be having a snack if they were at home. This is not promoted as

an aspect of book club and students are expected to attend for the books not the food. Book club members expect new members to participate fully. Book Club T-shirts are worn by the Teacher Librarian and Librarian working with book club and leaving Year 12 book club members are given a Book Club T-Shirt as a parting gift.



GGs book clubs have been running for several years now. Combined meetings of junior and senior book clubs with the Perth College Book Club have become a regular feature once a term. We have a long history of attending author events and viewing films together and have some keen bookcrossers in our membership. Some events are just for book club, whilst others are for any interested student with book club members forming the majority of the group simply because of their interest in books and reading. Book club members also enjoy little extras such as morning tea with a visiting author.

Critically important is the way that the book clubs have evolved. Students understand that the book clubs are theirs. Each year begins with a discussion about how members would like to run book club that year. Some years we have a lot of student facilitated meetings whilst other years students opt for a teacher facilitated approach. Each meeting we consider our plans for future meetings; whether there is a film coming up that we would like to compare with its book, whether we feel like putting genres in a hat and choosing one to read in or whether members just feel like having a free read. Both staff and students regularly contribute ideas of

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approaching films, cool new books and coming author events. Students are not told that book club will be going to an event, rather they are asked if they would be interested in attending an event as a book club. Events with insufficient interest are not pursued. This is just one book club experience in one school. Hopefully it

demonstrates a student-centred approach that emphasises reading and discussion as an enjoyable expression of individual choice, cultural participation and a way of having a good time.

Merriwyn Spicer-Wensley and Alison Spicer-Wensley (WA)

Tell Us About Your School Book Club

Fiction Focus would love to know more about your school book clubs. Readers are invited to email cmiseval@dtwd.wa.gov.au to tell us about their models for successful school book clubs. A summary of responses will be published in Issue 1, 2011.

Ubud Writers and Readers Festival 2010

Ubud is considered to be the creative heart of Bali. Set high in the hills, the once sleepy village is now bustling, and for the past seven years four days in October have brought even more visitors, all with a purpose: sharing a love of books and writing.

The drive to Ubud from the airport takes more than an hour, and all along the route bright blue banners proclaim the 2010 festival. There are drawcards, of course: Anne Enright, Man Booker Prize winner; William Dalrymple, extraordinary travel writer who has made India his home for the past 25 years; Louis de Bernières, perhaps best known for *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, but author of works he regards more highly.

Australian names include Thomas Keneally, Christos Tsiolkas, Cate Kennedy, Shane Moloney, Frank Moorhouse, Nam Le, Joan London and Kirsty Murray.

But there is also the challenge of the new. The theme this year is *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Harmony in Diversity) and what sets Ubud apart from the many other writers' festivals is perhaps the diversity. Voices from all over Indonesia (but Bali in particular), Timor Leste, Burma, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, China, Sri Lanka, Lebanon, Palestinian Territories and Israel open our hearts and our minds to the political reality that defines the

lives of many writers: not least censorship, imprisonment and exile.

We learn that the smiling Bali seen by tourists masks a bloody past and a very uncertain future.

We also learn that there is a bright generation of young people, such as Ruby Murray and Antony Loewenstein who promise robust intellectual discourse in Australia in years ahead.

Kirsty Murray's fourth launch of *India Dark* holds special meaning, for it was at an earlier Ubud Festival that the idea of her book became tangible. People you meet ... ideas exchanged ... this is what such events are all about. First-time young adult author Dan Ducrou shares the journey to publication of *The Byron Journals* with the assurance and charm of a far more established writer.

So much still to think about (somebody described it as 'Pilates for the mind'), so much more to say than this brief glimpse and a year to digest it all before Ubud 2011 beckons.

For more information visit <http://ubudwritersfestival.com>

Judi Jagger (WA)