



Growing a Book Club

A book is like a garden carried in the pocket. ~Chinese Proverb

Books can be dangerous. The best ones should be labeled: "This could change your life." ~Helen Exley

To read without reflecting is like eating without digesting. ~Edmund Burke

He fed his spirit with the bread of books. ~Edwin Markham

Books plant thoughts, allow imaginations to grow, nourish souls, and give us opportunities to share what we have reaped from the words on a page. Book clubs with youth can engage young readers in faithful discussions and can foster a common bond in sharing love of a book.

How to Choose a Book

- Watch and Listen. Youth are great at telling you what they are interested in reading. You may have to do a bit of eavesdropping or looking at the stacks of books they carry to and from school, but you can find out what hero they love and what villain they love to hate just by paying attention. Choose a book to read based on that one youth who sits quietly, ferociously devouring every word of a book before youth programs.
- Ask and you shall receive. Give youth an opportunity to tell you about their favorite authors and books by simply posting the question on a social media website. Or as each youth introduces themselves at a youth program, ask them to share their name, along with the book they are reading right now, the last book they read, or their favorite book.
- Visit your local bookstore. Not only does your local bookstore highlight the best sellers for young adult reads, but you can also ask any of the clerks their opinion on books. Most are well-read and willing to share their thoughts on best books for each age. If you're lucky, your local book store features staff picks.
- Pay attention. Notice what books are being made into movies, and set your book club to coincide with the release. Then, you can increase attendance by enticing youth book club and a movie!

How to Create a Book Club

- Read a book for fun. If you are not enjoying the book, chances are your youth will not enjoy it either.
- Use your margins, and don't forget to highlight/underline. Try using a highlighter or pencil as a book mark, so as a thought jumps off the page or moves you to tears or a smile creeps across your face, you can easily underline and highlight a quote. Fill your margins with questions, themes or foreshadowing. If a scene in the book reminds you of a Bible story or a famous quote or current event, write those thoughts down, too. These notes will help you build your questions and activities for your book club.
- Once you have finished reading the book, you may want to take your top ten or twenty quotes to build questions for the youth to discuss. While many questions can and should be recalling the events of the book, consider adding a question or thought to take the youth beyond simple recall answers. Create questions that put them youth in the character's shoes. (Examples: How would you feel? Why do you think he/she reacts in that way? Is this a realistic reaction to the event? How would you respond to this event? What does this scene remind you of from our stories of faith?)
- Consider offering an entering activity, where students have something to engage them while they are waiting on the rest of the group to arrive. This could be creating a nametag, answering open ended questions written on a whiteboard or butcher paper, or drawing a picture of what they imagine the setting to look like, etc.
- Open with students introducing themselves and sharing their favorite characters, quotes or events with a story. If students are having difficulty opening up, give them "would you rather" choices. Would you rather be _____ character or _____ character? Ask them to stand on separate sides of the room based on their choice, and explain why they made that choice to their group.
- Though the majority of your book club will consist of discussion questions, take into account that some youth engage by doing. You may want to offer an activity that offers reflection through a game, craft, or other visual arts.
- Make a connection to faith. Often the dialogue directly addresses issues of faith, and characters may struggle with their own beliefs and moral issues. Be sure to allow these elements of faith journeys and decision making to sneak into your discussions. Other times, characters will be written with traits similar to those of Biblical characters or their actions may mimic those of a person of the Bible. You may want to have youth read a scripture that relates to an event from the story. Consider using a children's version of a Biblical story. These often condense and summarize a story that you may not have enough time to read otherwise. You may also want to have students read a scripture that may have helped a character in the book with a particular dilemma. Allow students an opportunity to share how their beliefs and morals impact how they make decisions and live out their faith.
- Close your book club by asking students to share what they learned from this book. Ask students how they can apply the character's successes and failures to their daily lives.

How to Promote

Once you have decided on a book, date, and time for your youth's book club, consider using some teasers outside your regular newsletter and email to get your youth excited.

- Use social media to gauge which youth are reading. Ask questions like “who is your favorite character?”
- Use social media to allow youth to share their favorite quote from the book.

- Be cautious not to spoil events of the book with your teasers.
- Set up a group snap chat. Take a picture of the book cover and write a caption of the book club details.
- Ask a youth to help you promote by creating a tweet about what they are looking forward to discussing at book club.
- Consider sending out formal invitations in the style of the time period the book was written.

Ways to Set the Atmosphere for Book Club

- Consider providing snacks that are similar to what is eaten in the book.
- Dress up as one of the main characters and encourage the youth to do the same.

- Post significant quotes from the book throughout the room.
- Print and post pictures of significant landscapes and settings or places visited by characters in the book.

How to Get Youth (and Adults) to Read Before Book Club

You may find that you've read the book, prepared a lesson, and set up for a spectacular event, to have only a few youth show up and fewer who have actually read the book.

- Encourage youth to attend even if they have not read the book. All are welcome to participate, but be clear that the purpose of the gathering is to discuss the book. If they are not prepared for the events of the book to be discussed for fear of spoilers, they may not want to attend. Most youth want to be with their friends, and will eventually read the book. It may just not be prior to book club.
- Try choosing a book off of the summer reading list that many of your youth will have to finish. Plan your book club at the end of the summer or the first week of school before extracurricular activities begin. This not only ensures higher attendance and a larger group of readers, but also helps them accomplish two things by reading one book. Your book club discussion may even help

youth retain more events of the book, in turn, helping them get a better grade.

- Give incentives to those youth who read the book. Instead of blatantly saying, “Those who finished the book, get a prize,” try offering a game of jeopardy or other riddles. This not only allows you to award the readers, but also gives the group a chance to recall the events of the story.
- Some readers need more nudging than others. Try setting a timeline for what chapters they should read per week. Have an accountability group meeting, where those youth planning to participate in book club will meet for a few minutes prior to Sunday School to check in with one another on how far they have read. They can share in their progress, set goals for the next week, and dole out a little positive peer pressure to those who may be struggling to read. Though face-to-face accountability tends to have greater influence, you may choose to set up an accountability group via facebook or texting.