ARRT Book Club Study
Leadership Training
Monday, August 7th, 2017
3:15-4 p.m.
Deerfield Public Library
11 participants

Leader: Elizabeth Hopkins
Notetaker: Melissa Stoeger

-How many specifically have a nonfiction book discussion? 1
-How many only do fiction? 8
-If you don't use nonfiction titles for book discussions, why?
-The books are slow, boring, can get bogged down in facts
-Want to avoid political issues
-Worried about picking a book that is sensitive to the audience; examples: Stiff by Mary Roach for a group of seniors, When Breathe Becomes Air can be uncomfortable for people who have/had cancer.

-Choice is important, picking the right title is difficult
-Any tricks for dealing with political statements?
-stop trying to keep politics out of the discussion
-"Let's get back to the topic…"
-Sensitive issues: Many topics can be sensitive, but we never know what patrons have been through-discussions can get tense or emotional. People can have different reactions to books depending on the time in their lives.
-give the group a selection of titles and let them choose

-How has attendance been at nonfiction book discussions?
-When Breathe Becomes Air had high attendance because many people have had cancer experiences either themselves or with a loved one

-Do you have rules about length when you discuss nonfiction?
-select titles with shorter page length because nonfiction takes longer to read
-Under 300 pages
-If selecting longer titles, schedule discussion during a time when they have a longer period to read the book. If it's an interesting book, patrons will tolerate longer titles
-350-400 pages

-What are some unique challenges to discussing nonfiction titles?
-Political arguments
-Harder to come up with questions because publishers usually don't publish book discussion questions for nonfiction titles.
Use questions from older discussions, for example: if you are discussing a memoir, look at the questions you used for other memoirs and re-work those to fit.
-Patrons may expect you to be an expert about the topic being discussed
-Space apart the nonfiction. Many people didn't want back to back nonfiction discussions, although some enjoyed comparing back to back memoirs.
-Nonfiction isn't always available in large print and/or audio

Titles that Worked (Or Didn't)
Brain on Fire by Susannah Cahalan—patrons enjoyed the title, good discussion
Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World that Can't Stop Talking by Susan Cain—boring, thumbs down
The Signal and the Noise by Nate Silver—thumbs down, people felt bogged down in the minutia
The Journal of Best Practices: A Memoir of Marriage, Asperger Syndrome and One Man's Quest to Be a Better Husband by David Finch—good title and discussion
Three Year Swim Club: The Untold Story of Maui's Sugar Ditch Kids and Their Quest for Olympic Glory by Julie Checkoway—thumbs down
Behind the Beautiful Forevers by Katherine Boo—great story, descriptive, but patrons felt it was too depressing
Hillbilly Elegy by J. D. Vance—large audience, good discussion
The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration by Isabel Wilkerson—long read but good discussion
Down the Rabbit Hole: Curious Adventures and Cautionary Tales of a Former Playboy Bunny by Holly Madison—this is what happens when you let the patrons choose the book (they didn't like it)
Hyperbole and a Half: Unfortunate Situations, Flawed Coping Mechanisms, Mayhem and Other Things That Happened by Allie Brosh (graphic novel)—thumbs up, easy to read
Let's Pretend This Never Happened by Jenny Lawson—most people enjoyed Jenny Lawson's memoirs, but one felt it was too crazy to be true.
Furiously Happy by Jenny Lawson
Stiff by Mary Roach—despite the all senior crowd, they enjoyed this book and had a good discussion
When Breath Becomes Air by Paul Kalanithi—became very personal, but people were very respectful of others

What we're trying:
Death of Expertise: The Campaign Against Established Knowledge and Why It Matters by Thomas Nichols
The People's History of Chicago by Kevin Koval (poetry)