

ARRT Literary Book Discussion
Leadership Training
Boy, Snow, Bird by Helen Oyeyemi
Thursday January 12, 2017
3:10-4pm
Schaumburg Township District Library
19 participants

Leader: Becky Spratford
Notetaker: Becky Spratford
Topic: Managing the Group Dynamic During Book Discussions

Becky began by handing out a copy of this [Leadership and Group Norms handout](#). She went over it and how to use it. You can see more about that [here](#).

After Becky went over how to create the norms and how she has used them, the participants were encouraged to share their stories about group dynamic issues. Their thoughts are shared below without names or libraries attached:

- We had a handful of new members who were also new to leading book discussions. We promised not to scare them, but we would be honest about the challenges of managing the group.
- Becky talked about how library school and our work experience prepares us on how to lead a discussion of a book. Also with practice this part is not hard. But nowhere do we get training on how to manage the group dynamic. How do we learn to handle disagreements, complaints, problematic participants, etc? Even with the best groups, these issues will come up. We need to be there to help each other for that.
- Also, using a norms or rules system as Becky offered at the start is a way for the entire group to be aware of what is expected of them. As a leader, you can then use these rules to maintain order.
- Someone shared-- Right after the election our group did The Bean Trees by Barbara Kingsolver which has a big plot point about illegal immigrants. We were worried about emotions flaring. But we began by acknowledging the possibility of increased emotional responses and said that everyone in the room was allowed to call a time-out at anytime in the conversation got too intense.
 - This was a great idea because people were on edge because of the election anyway.
 - Becky suggested having that “time-out” option always-- if the group liked it. Makes it easier for you and them to take control of the group.

- Another sharing-- I start with all of my housekeeping details before we begin the discussion. So anything that isn't about the book but is about the group itself or upcoming library things are out of the way. I even introduce the next book at the beginning because I know some people may have to leave right away at the end.
 - I tell them I do this to keep the discussion time sacred.
 - It also makes it easy for me to keep things on track.
 - We address the things that may derail the discussion up front. People know they can get it out then and they don't save it up for discussion time.
 - This includes food and drink issues [which were discussed at length later]
- The group discussed the pros and cons of asking the participants to rate the book at the start vs the end of the discussion. People do both and they had reasons on why one worked better for them than the other.
 - Someone else said they do something slightly different. Instead of rating the book, she asks everyone to begin by saying what they most want to talk about for the book.
 - In general it was agreed that when you go around and ask everyone a general question like these it is a good way to encourage the quiet people to participate.
 - Becky also warned against "hating" on the listeners. Some people get a lot out of the discussion by listening to others. They might not want to share but if they are actively listening, that is fine too.
- Becky suggested creating an atmosphere where collecting feedback is welcome. You can start by outright asking people if they like how the discussions go. Not what you discussed in particular but how.
 - People began sharing that they didn't realize it but they do regularly get comments both positive and negative about how the group is going, it is just that those comments are often given outside of book club time, like when they are on the desk.
 - Becky said that is great, just remember to keep those comments in mind when you are back at the next discussion. Feel free to share comments with the group without calling out who gave them. So you could say, "I have heard people didn't like rating the book at the start. Maybe we could try something different this time and then we can talk about what we prefer as a group next time." This addresses concerns AND encourages more feedback in the future.
- Someone asked-- What do you do about ambiguous endings? Do you start with them right away, or do you make people wait?
 - The group seemed to all agree that it depends on the group.
 - If the ending is crazy weird or open, acknowledge it from the start and ask people if they want to tackle it first.

- Go with what they want. The goal is to get people talking. Ending first is fine if it gets people talking. But people may want to address other things BEFORE getting to the ending.
- We had a discussion on “The Great Food Wars.” Someone shared a specific problem with their group and the food offered. This particular issue ended in a complaint to the Library Board. Yikes.
 - All were happy to learn that many group’s biggest complaints are about the food. We were all relieved to not be alone on this issue.
 - Becky reminded everyone that if their biggest problems revolve around food, they are doing a great job leading the book discussions. You have to remember that some people like to complain.
 - It was suggested that you need to create a policy about food and get your supervisors involved. If there is a policy there is no argument.
 - Trying to have a little food and drink as possible makes the most sense from a money, staff time, and complaint issue.
 - People shared how much extra time and effort the food set up takes.
 - Someone said, we meet at 1 and end by 3, they don’t need a snack. Bring your own if you want though.
- The group discussed possible future Leadership Topics. Becky shared that in the summer we would be discussing a nonfiction book and the leadership topic would be about using nonfiction in book discussions.
 - It was decided that the May Leadership Topic would be on Recruiting New Members and Retaining Old Ones.