

ARRT Literary Book Discussion Notes

Wednesday, October 28, 2015

Leadership Discussion Topic: How does your group choose its books

Arlington Heights Memorial Library

Leader: Becky Spratford

Note Taker: Becky Spratford

21 participants present

In a switch from the normal schedule due to Becky having a conflict, the Leadership Training Discussion was held BEFORE the discussion of the book, *Before You Know Kindness*.

Q: How do you choose books for your groups?

- With my 20 and 30 somethings group, I want them to have some ownership of the group so we mix up the suggestions to include some by me and some by them
 - Then I gather up the actual books and bring them to the meeting (one copy of each) so people can get the books in their hands and look them over
 - We narrow it down this way and then I make a web survey to vote. This allows people to vote privately and includes people who miss that meeting in the vote.
 - We do 10 titles a year and plan the whole year at that event.
- Becky commented on what a great idea it is to bring the physical books to a meeting where the titles are being chosen.
- One library has each of their book club leaders prepare a list of three books they think the groups should discuss. Then the groups vote, but they can only pick one book from each page. This way all of the leaders' choices are represented.
 - Becky commented on how this is a great idea because it means the titles are coming from suggestions of different people and it is not always the same person who is responsible for choosing the books.

Q: Is anyone having trouble with complaints and people not liking the book you choose?

- We always have some complaints
- We changed from asking for suggestions to the librarians only picking. We get complaints both ways.
- Some people just like to complain about the book. Or complain in general.

A general discussion about how books are picked started with most people saying that their groups want the librarians to pick for them.

Some fun ideas about picking different books were shared:

- Once a year, we let each person put a favorite book in a hat and we randomly pick one out. That book becomes our December book for that year. We also always pick a backup in case the title chosen is not going to work for some reason or other. This year's randomly chosen title is *Far From the Madding Crowd*.
- We always did a book with a movie in December and had a party. That way you could take the month off if you wanted.

- We do a Book Swap party instead of a discussion in December.
- In June our group always does a children's book. One of the participants leads this discussion and the group bring their grandchildren to the discussion. We also always do a Food related book in July and a holiday book in December.
- There is a library who is going to focus on a decade next year. They are going to read books from the 1950s in all genres for a year. Fiction and Nonfiction.
- Try using Bookmarks Magazine and their listing of what happened in an entire year in the book world. If your library is having an anniversary of some kind, this is a fun idea.
- In September for Banned Books Week, read a challenged book and then frame the discussion around "Why" it was challenged.

Q: Do you have to have read the book before you will include it as a choice for your group?

- I like not reading before because they I get to experience reading along with them. In fact, some of my best book discussions are when the group all liked the book and I didn't. They make it their goal for the discussion to change my mind. It's fun.
- When you haven't read it ahead of time, you are able to share that first reaction as a reader.
- Becky took a vote and it was about 60-40 in favor of NOT having to have read the book ahead of time
- The people who need to read the book before shared their thoughts:
 - I need to know ahead of time. I will not put it up for a vote if I have not read it already.

Q: People will ask at some point, "Who chose this book?" and they will then want to know why it was chosen. How do you respond to this?

- You need to have thought through your process and why you do it that way ahead of time. Then you can respond clearly and confidently.
- You need to be willing to change the way you do things if it is not working.
- There was an example of a library which works from a prepared list that the group and its leader has no say in. One year the list was very WWII heavy and the participants were getting annoyed. Nothing could be done. Not good for keeping people.

Q: How far in advance do you pick your books?

- There were various responses ranging from 8 who said they pick a year at once to others who do ½ a year at a time, but most people were picking based on the libraries printed publicity schedule, which can be difficult based on when in the month your group meets. That also varied between needing a new list every 3-4 months or sometimes every 2 months.
- One group does genres. First they vote on a genre, then the librarian picks a few books in the genre and they vote on one. She does this only 2 months in advance. It is a lot of work.
- A few people shared very complicated and time intensive choosing procedures.
- People shared how helpful it is to ask people to vote for more options than you need. It gives you a clearer picture of which books are the most popular. Fewer ties.

Q: Do you ever use Hardcover/really new books?

- One person talked about how they do often chose new books because people want to discuss them, but then when they collect the copies into their book club bags, the bags are very heavy and large.
- Another person shared that she has a 6 mo rule. The book must have been out for 6 months before she will allow them to discuss it. This helps to stay away from high demand on new books.
- A few others said rule was they had to be in paperback. This means they are older so hopefully easier to get. But this also means very popular books don't get discussed. Groups like to discuss the hot new books.
- Becky suggested the way to handle this issue is to make a rule, have a reason for it, and stick to it ALWAYS. No exceptions. People will be fine is there is a rule. Then they know where they stand for each title they may want to discuss. Her group stopped asking for titles unless they knew ahead of time that they fit the "rules"
- Someone else said that she tells her group, since they don't do books until in paperback, that they are always welcome to read the books they want whenever they want. Don't let the discussion rules stop you from reading something. Maybe we will discuss it down the line. Then you have read it.
- One library uses Friends money to buy multiple copies of the expensive, hardcover, hot books. Then they have special book discussions for these titles. The hope that this will draw new people into the regular book discussions.

If there is a topic you would like to discuss at a future Leadership Training, please let Becky know [bspratford@hotmail.com]. A survey will go out to all members to solicit more ideas and topics for future meetings

Please join us for our next Literary Book Discussion on Wednesday, February 17, 2016 at 2pm at Bensenville Community Public Library. We will discuss *Lexicon* by Max Barry and the Leadership Training topic will focus around discussing genre fiction titles.