

ARRT Literary Book Discussion
Leadership Training
Tuesday, September 27, 2016
3:15-4pm
Niles Public Library
16 participants

Leader: Becky Spratford
Notetaker: Becky Spratford
Topic: Using Diverse Books In Book Discussions

We talked about how we discuss diversity in book discussion groups and people shared stories of participants saying shockingly racist things.

- One participant admitted that once when someone was outright racist she was too shocked to do anything.
- A few others said that discussing diverse books helps everyone to start discussing the larger societal issues around racism. A book is a nice entry point.

When one group discussed Everything I Never Told You specifically the issues of race came up and the discussion was good, but it made the leader realize how non-diverse the group itself was. This limited their discussion because they did not have a variety of viewpoints.

One person actively tries to incorporate diverse titles because her group is very white.

People started sharing diverse books they discussed:

- Americanah by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie
 - We had a great discussion, but our group is very diverse. Friend did it with her group that was all white and said she felt the discussion had a racist tone.
 - This is a challenging book. It challenges you to take a hard look at your life.
- The Sympathizer by Viet Thanh Nguyen
 - Becky led this in three locations for RAILS. Details [here](#).
- The Vegetarian by Han Kang
- Under the Feet of Jesus by Helena María Viramontes

When you pick a book, as a leader, ask yourself what you are trying to do with the discussion. We have an important job- to shape the discussion, to allow issues to be discussed openly and respectfully. People shared on this topic:

- We try to make our discussions challenging so we seek out books that we wouldn't read on our own.
- We strive for variety in every way. I consider race but also gender.
- My group only does "Hot Titles" and they are often less diverse. But we did do Between the World and Me by Ta-Nehisi Coates.
- We have to talk to our groups about how we pick what we will discuss. If they are resistant to more diverse books, we can explain why they make better discussions.

- When you have authors of different ethnicities you draw different people to your discussions and they bring different perspectives.
- We have a group for 20s and 30s somethings and they expect the books to be diverse. When they are not as diverse, they challenge us.

Have faith in the book. If it is a good discussion book, people will read it and participate:

- People in book club are more adventurous than our average patrons.
- Don't say, "I can't give this to my little old white ladies." Don't assume.
- Books are a great way to have discussions about diversity and some challenging issues about race.

How do you handle racist remarks?:

- We need to talk about this because if you pick a diverse book it could happen.
- One person said she has put a stop to these comments by saying, "That's your point of view, let's here another one."
- Bring it back to the book and the author and take the control out of the hands of the person with the inflammatory opinion. This removes your personal involvement.
- You want to encourage participation, but when it goes down a racist road you have to everything in your power to stop it.
- Despite our differences, having a shared experience of reading brings us together.

We ended by talking about how we all are trying to have full discussion on real issues.