

CBJ Book Club

The genesis of the book club was a conversation with a Language Arts teacher, Mrs. Haynes, about wanting to have a way to get students engaged in reading that might not be traditional “frequent flyers” in the library. We thought a book club would be a good idea and I sought out a book that might be interesting and that would elicit conversation from students.

After first reviewing Varian Johnson’s *The Parker Inheritance* - too long and fairly challenging due to the ‘Clue’ like nature of the plot - we settled on Jewell Parker Rhodes’ *Ghost Boys*. The book is highly reviewed, wasn’t too long and had a timely subject matter. We ran the book choice and the justification by the principal and he approved, so we began soliciting students.

We hung posters and also made announcements inviting students to sign up for the Book Club in the library. At this point, another teacher, Mrs. Broyles, joined us as well. We had about 6 students sign up and get copies of the book to begin reading. Our first meeting was set for March 18.

No one showed up.

Undeterred, we contacted students with a handwritten note and reminded them of the date and time of the next meeting. We also kept advertising for new members and picked up a few more.

The ‘new’ members came to the next meeting, the following week, but the original sign ups did not. The new members read to various points in the book, so it was difficult to have a discussion without giving the ending away. Then we were on hiatus for a week due to STAAR testing.

At this point, our book club has pretty much broken down. We are planning to have a final meeting and picking back up in Fall 2019, but I took away some important lessons for next year:

- We don’t need to meet as often as we’d planned.
 - After consulting with other librarians in various Facebook groups, I think our idea of meeting weekly was overkill. Many of them reported meeting once a month, giving students the time to have completed the entire book. That’s a better plan than the small chunks we were picturing. It solves the problem of not being able to talk about the book for fear of spoiling it.
- We need a firm reading goal.
 - Whether it’s a page number or to complete the entire book, this seems to work best with a definite ending point.
- We need to start earlier in the year.
 - We really waited too late to give this a try because we ran into testing season. I think if we’d have started in the fall with a monthly meeting goal or even quarterly like some Project LIT clubs do, we’d have been more successful.

I think by taking some of these things into account, we can have a more successful book club next year. Mrs. Haynes, Mrs. Broyles and I are committed to the idea and I was glad to get a chance to collaborate with them on something for our students.