Blog the Book: Considerations for Elementary School Libraries

Back in November at AASL, an elementary librarian asked me how this could work in an elementary setting, with a fixed schedule, 30 minute classes.... How could we possibly do this?

Since I have been promoting RICBA books for ten years, it took me a while to articulate these steps for the most successful possible outcome.

Like anything else with library, the best results come from true collaboration. And, like anything else with library, the collaboration strongly depends on the Library Media Specialist. So, let’s go through the steps:

1) Start early. The RICBA book list of nominees comes out late February? Early March? Put as many books as is sensible on hold at the public library so that you can read the books over April school vacation... or more reasonably, prior to June. (hint: read the picture books first, it will enhance your self esteem 😊) If you have a collaboration with your local public library to promote the state Summer Reading Program with public librarians visiting your school, all the better.

2) As you read the books, keep a running Google doc (because, really, you don’t know where you are when you read these books, and you may well be doing this on your phone). I kept the format simple, because you need to tailor it to your needs. Mine was:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title, Publisher, Year</th>
<th>Read it?</th>
<th>Connections?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Author, because you’ll forget. Title, Publisher, Year, # of pages, and GENRE, even though many of these books fit multiple genres and it’s better not to pigeon hole a book, but rather to embrace as many genres to appeal to as many readers (you’ll like this because it’s HUMOR, SCHOOL STORY, REALISTIC FICTION, etc).

The “Read it?” was to keep me honest, so I knew which books I still needed to request.

Connections: very important. Throw as many curricular connections as you can. 1) Helps to justify using your budget to purchase these books. Oh, these books have a SCIENCE and MATH connection (remember Math = Trouble from last year?) Also, relate everything in the world to the Common Core and you’re good. So the RICBA non-fiction, biographies, photo-essays are a blessing. Point out the text features and you’re golden.

Sample entries:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Age(s)</th>
<th>Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Applegate, Katherine</td>
<td>The One and Only Ivan (Harper, 2012)</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>silverback ape takes care of baby elephant; all animals mistreated in zoo; Ivan creates a billboard to rescue baby elephant and have her taken to a proper zoo. Empathy; natural science; habitats; friendship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bishop, Nic</td>
<td>Snakes (Scholastic Nonfiction, 2012)</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Nic Bishop. Close ups of fun reptiles. Fun facts on snakes. What else needs to be said?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nobleman, Marc Tyler</td>
<td>Bill the Boy Wonder: The Secret Co-Creator of Batman (Charlesbridge, 2012)</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Awesome graphic novel comic book format about Bill (Milton) Finger, the co-creator and uncredited author of Batman. Amazing book for students to begin to understand about intellectual property. They get hooked by this one.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weiner, Ellis</td>
<td>The Templeton Twins Have an Idea (Chronicle Books, 2012)</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Wonderful, original, minimally derivative book. Owes a lot to A Series of Unfortunate events. Haughty unknown narrator tells the story of the Templeton Twins, their father, and evil and somewhat deranged villain, and other contributing characters. The narrator ends each short chapter with “questions” which really poke fun at textbooks and ELA collections. Would make a great read aloud for 3rd and 4th grade. The illustrations are a hoot, as many of them are similar to Rube Goldberg diagrams.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Why do you do this? A) back up. B) You won’t remember otherwise.

3) After you have read as many of the books as you need to form an opinion, do a simple ppt (book covers only) or crib from something that someone else puts on the SLRI listserv (LOVE YOU GUYS). Last 2 library periods before summer break, preview the RICBA nominees for grades 2 (they will be third graders next Sept), 3, 4, 5 and also 6. Grade 6 should also preview whatever someone else has posted on RITBA. Sell these books with all the passion and theatricality you have.

4) If public librarians are visiting your school to promote summer reading program, pair up with that librarian to promote RIBCA/RITBA book reading over summer vacation. Repeat, sell these books with all the passion and theatricality you have. Not only will your students read good books, but they also get credit in public library summer reading program. Win/win.

5) Use the summer to crib or adapt this LibGuide, or do it in a wiki form. No sweat either way. [http://mrsrosetech.wikispaces.com/Book+Review+Assignment](http://mrsrosetech.wikispaces.com/Book+Review+Assignment)

(boy, does that look crude compared to the LibGuide, but if you do a wiki, you can make it prettier. Take my advice: use graphics)
6) The first day of school, go up to the 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th grade teachers and recommend the books that will be most successful and memorable for those grade students. It’s important to bring in curriculum connections, character education, etc. The minute I said that *Wonder* was a powerful story about bullying and accepting differences, I was in. I convinced the 3rd grade teachers to read *The Templeton Twins* (huge success). The 4th grade teachers switched off between *Ivan* and *Wonder*. The 5th grade teachers eventually read *Wonder*, but by then the demand was so high that kids either went to the public library or requested the books they wanted for Christmas.

7) Early in the school year, introduce the students to either your LibGuide or your wikipage. Orient them to the RICBA blog, the “validation” process (“no, I am not an artificial intelligence robot, I am an elementary school student”). I also encourage them to only write reviews of books they enjoyed, because why would they recommend a book they didn’t enjoy? Also, it’s more challenging to be positive than negative in our culture. The discussions are repeated and repeated (and reinforced) in the LibGuide. I introduce internet safety and everyone knows that we will visit that again, and again, and again.

8) Read the 3 shortest books to all kids grades 3 – 5/6. It keeps enthusiasm up, and also everyone will be eligible to vote.

9) After the teachers read your RICBA recommendations, the kids will nag them for other books. The grade level teachers will trade their books. The kids will get impatient and surreptitiously take the books out of the public library, especially if the classroom teachers warn them not to read ahead of the class.

10) The classroom teachers see how nuts the students are about the books. You can now approach them with a collaborative project that will help the students’ writing (huge), get them to reflect (another big one), and utilize technology (bingo!). Explain that you will supply the organizers and orient the students. The classroom teacher will provide: a) blocks of time for the students to write their reviews; b) time for students to peer edit and revise; c) classroom time to use classroom computers to use Word to type the reviews and cut/paste to enter the Word document into the Google form (cut/paste through different windows is a PARCC skill! Pass it on!) Once you have collected the book reviews in your Google form, you can cut and paste these more or less finished products and send on to the RICBA webmaster.

11) Go over the graphic organizer and the rough draft rough and the Google book review form with the students. Ideally, if you can project the graphic organizer and do it as a group with the class, they will get the feel for it. Unfortunately, by this time, you have to worry about your SLO/SOO data and your evaluation and your curriculum and you can’t use library time for the kids to do more than one sample
graphic organizer. (Please do not make the book review an SLO. It’s hard enough getting one of these from the students. Trying to get three? Please, no.)

12) Now it’s time to turn the book review process over to the classroom teacher. They agreed ahead of time to collaborate.

13) Plan to visit classrooms during your free (?) time to reinforce the importance of this collaboration. Continue to get the kids excited about the books.

14) When the reviews hit your Google doc, send them on to the RICBA webmaster.

15) Before February voting, create a Google form for RICBA voting. This is the easiest way for your kids to vote. My students voted on a smart board, that way I was sure each student only voted for one book and I could more or less verify that they had read the book. And it was fast. Now my smart board doesn’t work anymore but I can use it as an expensive projector surface and click on the book while my student clicks on the non-functioning white board surface. Here is a fine example of how to do this from Carolyn Steward of Oak Lawn Elementary School in Cranston:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/182Zn0rEYFes7dRQh-kYHxCLertAVU1RERVX5VqvBEAw/viewform

16) Now that they have voted, they are empowered and they have bought into RICBA. They are reading new, fun and GOOD literature. When the winner is announced, they will either celebrate their favorite or bemoan that their book was gypped. Either way, the library can celebrate.

17) Don’t forget to document this collaboration as aligning to the Common Core (somewhere, book reviews are aligned to the CCSS). FYI, many relevant standards (bet you can brainstorm a few more) are on the Blog the Book Libguide at:

http://guides.rilinkschools.org/blogthebook

I have redundantly repeated them at:

http://guides.rilinkschools.org/content.php?pid=416316&sid=4012264

So, this pays obeisance to the Common Core, ELA standards, ISTE Standards, AASL Standards, it’s reflective, it’s positive, it has an internet safety and awareness component, it incorporates technology and it utilizes PARCC preparation skills!! So cool.

18) Thank you for letting me ramble. This project is a lot of work, preparation and prelude, but it’s worth it. But it’s only really possible, like so many things we do, as a true collaboration with the classroom teachers.

Your Colleague, Sue Rose, Cranston Public Schools