

Inspiring Students to Seek out New Reading Experiences to Build Empathy

Handout from NCTE 2023 Workshop "Connection Starts with Curiosity"

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Potential Book Club Ideas for Teachers

The power of community/allies: *The Unforgettable Logan Foster* by Shawn Peters, *Efren Divided*, and *Falling Short* by Ernesto Cisneros, the Drew Leclair series by Katryn Bury, *Sir Fig Newton* and *the Science of Persistence* by Sonja Thomas

Standing up for what is right/persevering in the face of challenge: *The Unforgettable Logan Foster* by Shawn Peters, *Efren Divided*, and *Falling Short* by Ernesto Cisneros, the Drew Leclair series by Katryn Bury, *Sir Fig Newton* and *the Science of Persistence* by Sonja Thomas

Using Curiosity as a Tool for Empathy: *The Unforgettable Logan Foster* by Shawn Peters, *Efren Divided*, and *Falling Short* by Ernesto Cisneros, the Drew Leclair series by Katryn Bury, *Sir Fig Newton* and *the Science of Persistence* by Sonja Thomas

Secrets, Clues, and Finding the Truth: *The Unforgettable Logan Foster* by Shawn Peters and the Drew Leclair series by Katryn Bury

Superpowers and superheroes (hidden and obvious): *Efren Divided* by Ernesto Cisneros and *The Unforgettable Logan Foster* by Shawn Peters

Essential and Guiding Questions to drive Class Discussion and Reading

Teachers can choose 2-3 to best suit a full class study of one novel, or book clubs.

1. How does curiosity act as a tool for empathy? How can I use this tool in my life?
2. Is "fitting in" always good?
3. Should we tell the truth even if it means getting hurt or losing friends?
4. How can you use your superpower to build empathy and foster curiosity?
5. What does it mean to do the right thing?
 - a. What do you stand to gain? To lose?
6. What does it mean to be a good friend?
7. What are the benefits and challenges of being an ally or good friend, especially when others are choosing not to be?
8. Are secrets always meant to be kept?
9. What makes us who we are? How can we be who we are, especially when others want us to be something else?
10. How are people changed or transformed by their relationships with others?
11. How can we persist when obstacles and assumptions are in the way?

Book Pairings

The contemporary books from the panel presentation make great pairings with other middle grades/YA novels, non-fiction books, and picture books. Below is a small sampling of texts that pair well with themes of curiosity and empathy as well as perseverance, allyship, and honesty. This list is by no means exhaustive and is meant as a starting point to explore more books and authors.

Middle Grades Books

Tiger Rising by Kate De Camillo

All American Boys by Jason Reynolds

The Track Series by Jason Reynolds

Stuntboy in the Meantime by Jason Reynolds and illustrated by Raúl the Third

Harriet the Spy by Louise Fitzhugh

The Science of Breakable Things by Tae Keller

Zenobia July by Lisa Bunker

The Benefits of Being an Octopus by Ann Braden

When Stars are Scattered by Omar Mohamed and Victoria Jamieson

Picture Books

Ada Twist, Scientist by Andrea Beaty (picture book)

Turning Pages: My Life Story by Sonia Sotomayor and illustrated by Lulu Delacre

The Day You Begin by Jacqueline Woodson and illustrated by Rafael López

The Hundred Dresses by Eleanor Estes and illustrated by Louis Slobodkin

Octopus Stew by Eric Valasquez

Some authors with multiple works that, in general, fit the themes and essential questions above. This might allow even more student choice.

- Kate DeCamillo
- Jason Reynolds
- Renee Watson
- Jacqueline Woodson
- Nic Stone

How to Help Students Find and Explore New Voices

How do we get students, especially those who have not discovered and embraced the joy of reading, to explore new and different stories? With all the demands on our time, it is important to find ways to encourage reading and the ideas below can be 15 mins. Or less if you don't have more time in your day.

1. **FLOOD THEM WITH BOOKS.**
 - a. Make short book talks part of every week.
 - b. Fill your classroom with books (as much as you can within your school budget).
 - c. Take them to the library weekly.
 - d. Sign them up for library cards as a class activity. Even better if you can take them to the public library or have a librarian come in!
 - e. Partner with librarians to do specific book tastings targeted to your specific students (graphic novel, memoir, Black author series, etc.)
 - f. Create displays with specific topics, short summaries, and student reviews.
2. Share your reading life and intentionally learn about theirs through surveys, questionnaires, and conferences.
3. Give time in class for reading.
4. Talk to students about their books and get them new ones if they don't like them. Encourage abandoning books they do not like.
5. Have students record reviews and share them on the class website, Google Classroom, or another public venue *or* have them leave written reviews inside books for other students to see.
6. Have students keep empathy and curiosity journals in which they write about their own experiences and the experiences they read about. Keep these low stakes and informal.
7. Create a reading challenge that intentionally pushes students to new genres, new authors, and new perspectives.
8. Create opportunities for students to discuss with you, counselors, parents, and other trusted adults any topics that are new, challenging, emotionally vulnerable or unfamiliar.
9. Encourage students to read more than one book (fiction or nonfiction) with a similar theme, topic, experience, or target audience to gain a balanced perspective.
10. Provide book lists and resources to help students browse and learn what is out there. You cannot go wrong with the ALA, and with award sites such as the Newbery Medal, Caldecott, Coretta Scott King, Stonewall, Pura Belpre, Printz, AILA.