

Case Study: Sarah Day, LRC Manager, The Ridgeway School and Sixth Form College, Wiltshire

The Gr8 Book Debate at the Ridgeway School

This year the library ran the Gr8 Book Debate with Lydiard Park Academy using BookTrust's School Library Pack. The School Library Pack is a set of forty books with accompanying resources including reading group guides and posters. The aim of the pack is to boost a school library's resources and support group reading activities. Sarah wanted to use the pack to test the assumption that regular book chats and group reading activities would help students to develop their identity as a reader, understanding what they do and do not like reading, as well as increase students' reading frequency.

The library registered for the pack in September and received it in January. The forty books were split between three categories; future classics, reluctant readers and non-fiction, and the five future classics came in sets of six books. When the library received the books, they were processed and catalogued ready for the launch of the Gr8 Book Debate. The event took part at Lydiard Park Academy and the 30 Year 8 students - fifteen from each school - were introduced to the project and the titles. The students read the taglines and blurbs before deciding which book they each wanted to read first.

After the launch weekly *Books and Biscuits* sessions were run in break time in the Learning Resource Centre, where the students were able to talk about what they had read so far and swap their future classic for a new one when they finished it. It was great to have a relaxed environment where the group could explore and share their opinions on these books in an informal setting.

These sessions ran from March to June before the final event in July. At the final debate, the thirty students from the two schools came back together to discuss the books. In groups of six, the students discussed one of the five titles, a different title in each group, and created a presentation showing what they liked and did not like about the book.

The groups then shared these presentations before they voted for their favourite book. While the votes were being counted, students heard messages from the authors, explaining more about their book and why they wrote it. There was a joint winner with *Boy 87* by Ele Fountain and *Ghost Boys* by Jewell Parker Rhodes taking the top spot!

Ridgeway School has five core values; respect, honesty, endeavour, creativity and community. Participation in the debate helped the Year 8 students to identify as readers of many genres of fiction and they became informal ambassadors for the texts read amongst their peers in the school community, encouraging other students to read books that they would not necessarily be drawn to. Once a week book debaters came to the LRC to talk to other students about what they were reading in a relaxed, happy environment. Not all students were known to one another, but chatting about the books created a bond and, whilst having differing and very strong views on the texts read, they were able to identify with and respect other viewpoints. Whilst impossible to quantify this impact, the fifteen participants demonstrated a high level of engagement as shown by their commitment to regularly attend the break time sessions and read all 5 books.

At the final debate, whilst all students were at ease discussing the texts, some students were out of their comfort zone standing up in front of their peers expressing their views especially as this was in front of students from another school. With encouragement, and despite nerves, every student spoke, giving a critique which was eloquent and persuasive. The students were also happy to address questions posed by their audience. At the end of the debate, all students took real pride in their contribution and what they had achieved.

The importance of character development and a rounded education have been highlighted by both the Department for Education and Ofsted. The Gr8 Books Debate shows the role extra-curricular reading activities can play in this, helping students to develop their resilience, confidence and independence.

References for this project include:

- BookTrust (2019) School Library Pack 2019, www.booktrust.org.uk/what-we-do/programmes-and-campaigns/school-library-pack/.
- Department for Education (2019) Education Secretary sets out vision for character and resilience, www.gov.uk/government/news/education-secretary-sets-out-vision-for-character-and-resilience.
- Ofsted (2019) The education inspection framework, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/801429/Education_inspection_framework.pdf.
- The Ridgeway School and Sixth Form College (2019) *Our Vision and Values*, www.ridgewayschool.com/about/vision-values.

There are several outcomes to this project. Firstly, all of the texts are catalogued on the library management system therefore it is possible to quantify the number of loans per text both as a direct result of using them in the debate, having a visible Gr8 Book Debate display and from peer recommendations. Secondly, all fifteen students were enrolled on the Accelerated Reader programme. This data can be examined to compare the standard scores of the students that took part in the debate against those that did not. Also, all five titles are quizzable on AR which meant that the comprehension of the text could be checked, supporting the evidence from our book borrowing statistics.

Whilst not quantitative, the third and by far the most important evidence, is the pleasure the students have received from reading the 5 books. Listening to them talk about the books in their library lessons with other students and their teachers is by far the most powerful and inspiring benefit. Furthermore, every student that participated has made it publicly known in the school community that they would like to join the team next year.

At the end of the project there were fifteen students who were enthused about the books and reading for pleasure generally. Sarah was keen to use this momentum to start a "snowball effect," getting other

students to read the five books in the debate and share their opinions. She did this by making a display of the five books, including the posters that were made during the final debate, and encouraging students to suggest their favourite title to their friends. So far, these fifteen students have been really effective as peer influencers and have helped to spread the enthusiasm generated in this project within their classes. The library will, without doubt, use the BookTrust books for a similar project next year.

Advice:

- See who else you can get involved. We worked with both Lydiard Park Academy and the BookTrust on this project. Working with another school allowed us to share the workload and BookTrust were able to provide the books as part of the School Library Pack programme. This also showed students that there is a wider reading community outside of the school.
- Encourage your students to have strong opinions about what they read and model being opinionated about books. We found that our students responded really well to this; it helped them to develop as discerning readers with an understanding of what they like reading.
- Think about "what next." It is important that the students involved keep reading and that they encourage others to get reading too once the project has finished. Keep this in mind when designing and delivering the project.