

Teachers encourage love of reading

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
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Many things distract kids from reading

Some kids are bookworms.

Others would rather do anything else than pick up a book.

In this electronic age, stuffed with every kind of activity imaginable, librarians and teachers must try to figure out ways to pique student interest in reading.

Dudley Elementary school librarian Angie Richeson thinks it's more difficult to get students interested in books because of activities, technology, television, movies and video games.

"Most days I feel like I am doing a song and dance but in a good way," Richeson said. "I am willing to go the extra mile to get to know them and help them find just the right book."

Finding right book important

Gothenburg junior and senior high librarian Lori Long said there are many ways to get students to stick their noses in books or participate in any type of reading.

"I think finding the one book that can hook you is important," she explained. "It might be about finding a purpose like a how-to book or it might be a professional journal or other non-fiction materials."

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Long often conducts “patron interviews” to stimulate student interest.

“I might ask when was the last time they finished a book they liked and what was it?”

Or she inquires about favorite and least-favorite movies.

Popular books in the high school media center include the Diary of a Wimpy Kid series, The Hunger Games, sports fiction books by such authors as Kris Crutcher, Carl Deuker and Mike Lupica and a couple of series based on the “Pretty Little Liars” and television show and “The Clique.”

In the past few weeks, Long has had many conversations with juniors involved in an American author unit through Mary Clark’s English class.

Students research authors, including reading two novels written by that author, and complete a literary analysis.

Knowing students helps

Richeson said she tries to make contact with all students who walk through the door.

After three years in her position, Richeson said she finally feels like she has a general idea of what most of the kids are reading, what they like to read and how long it takes them to finish a

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book.

Without such interaction, she said it would be easy to lose students to distractions.

Richeson said she thinks it's important for kids to read and to learn to read for pleasure.

"I have heard so many adults tell me that they 'hate' to read and I always wonder what happened in their past related to reading that made them not enjoy it," she said.

Whether or not a person likes to read is based on their life experiences, Richeson said, and the kinds of experiences they've had with books and reading.

"If children are forced to read books over and over that don't interest them or connect to their lives in some way, reading will never become intrinsically motivating to them," she said.

But if children are given the opportunity to read books that interest them, and reading isn't a daunting task, they will learn that it can be fun and rewarding, Richeson said.

Practice of reading needed

Long said she thinks reading is acquired but it also needs to be practiced.

Richeson agreed, noting the importance of elementary students who practice reading at their reading level, which is what the district's accelerated reading program is all about.

Through the program, she said she thinks students develop the skills needed to become

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successful readers.

Still, Richeson said she thinks there's a fine line between reading for practice and reading for pleasure, adding that she feels it's her job to help students define and understand that line.

"We want kids to enjoy reading and choose what they want to read but we also want them to actually be able to read and comprehend the book," she explained. "I think there needs to be happy medium."

District supports reading

Both Long and Richeson said reading is a priority for Gothenburg students and that they feel supported in their efforts.

The library, they said, provides diverse materials (including electronic devices) to support the curriculum, literacy standards and provide information and personal reading opportunities for students.

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READING ENCOURAGED IN ENGLISH CLASSES		
Instead of the accelerated reading program used in Dudley Elementary and for junior and senior high students, high school students do independent reading and choose their own reading materials.	"I have had a lot of reluctant readers discover that they actually enjoy reading when they choose something themselves and can make a personal connection to the characters and themes," Zwick said, noting that students also do projects based on books they read several times during the year.	to get the group to go beyond sole comprehension.
"By this age, I think it's important for students to make decisions about what material they read for pleasure and to self-assess their choices of text, theme, etc.," said English and Spanish teacher Pat Zwick.	She said there is also daily focus on analysis, synthesis and evaluation of reading.	Once the story is read and the tasks are completed, the group meets and discusses in a round robin format.
Students are required to read a minimum of four books and each week complete a reading log that includes an analysis to encourage thought about the theme the author is exploring and its connection to them personally.	In sophomore and senior English classes, English teacher Roseanne Whiting has literary circles of five to six students who read the same chapter or short story.	Whiting said each student shares his or her "expertise" and the circle thoroughly discusses the story.
	Each completes a task based on ability and skill such as tracing the action of the story in a visual way or writing probing questions.	Sometimes she requires a short presentation where each student gives his/her part of the presentation.
		The literary circle allows students to interact with the reading in a way that suits their abilities while being within a collaborative environment that provides a comprehensive approach to the story, she said.