

# 21st Century Booktalks!

HEATHER GRUENTHAL

## STANDARDS, STANDARDS, STANDARDS!

Let's face it, you can't teach anything in classrooms today that does not move students towards mastery of one or more learning standards. With standards-based education and pacing guides, teachers feel pressured to deliver content. They may even cut out extras, like visits to the library, because they cannot fit it into their schedules. The solution: invite teachers to come back in to the library and teach a lesson for them that meets the standards and gets students reading using digital booktalks.

The number of books in the library overwhelms many students and their teachers. By narrowing the focus and advertising a smaller number of books by genre, students have a place to start. The genre booktalk also helps students to identify a genre to which they respond, helping to build readers.

A recurring English Language Arts Standards for Reading from grades 7 to 12 requires students to read and make comparisons between different works:

Grade Seven English Language Arts Standards,  
Reading:

- 3.0 Literary Response and Analysis; Narrative Analysis of Grade-Level-Appropriate Text;
- 3.4 Identify and analyze recurring themes across works (e.g., the value of bravery, loyalty, and friendship; the effects of loneliness)

(California State Board of Education, 2007)

Define these themes, building vocabulary in the process, and illustrate with examples. Share books in a genre, such as fantasy or historical fiction that focus on a theme such as friendship, courage, or loyalty. For a sample booktalk lesson plan incorporating standards for use in grades 7–12, see my wiki, referenced below. Once you get the students to identify with a particular genre, they are motivated to find other books in the same genre. For example, horror genre fans can move from R.L. Stine to Stephen King and fantasy fans can move from J.K. Rowling to J.R.R. Tolkien.

## READ THE MOVIE

An easy introduction to a genre, such as fantasy, is to give students a list of books that have been made into movies. Some recent examples include J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series, Susan Cooper's *The Dark is Rising* sequence, or

Black's *Spiderwick Chronicles*. Ask students what these books have in common and discuss the characteristics of the fantasy genre, such as magic, mythological creatures, or other worlds.

Next introduce them to the idea that all of these books-turned-movies started out in one genre and morphed into others. For example, first they were first novels, then were adapted into screenplays, and finally transformed to movies. In the course of this discussion, you can compare the book and movie versions, demonstrating why the book is almost always better. Classifying television shows or movies into genre categories helps hook in even the nonreaders by activating prior knowledge and making connections to something they like. See Edmonton Public Library's "Books Made into Movies" Web site and listing by genre, referenced below.

## BOOKTALK 1.0: POWERPOINT

Start getting technical by putting your booktalks on PowerPoint. The genre booktalk in this format features about 10 genres with five books listed on each slide and one accompanying book cover. For example, I have chosen *A Child Called It* by Dave Pelzer and connected this book to other problem novels on a slide entitled, *Life is Rough!* By linking popular books to others with similar themes, you broaden students' range of choice so that they realize that there are a number of desirable books in their favorite genre.

  
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Integrating technology should only be done if it enhances learning (Loertscher and Achterman, 2003, p. 97). The PowerPoint booktalk has many advantages over the traditional booktalk. Showing book covers on PowerPoint slides while you discuss them allows everyone to see them. You can pass the actual books around. Students can

copy down titles of books that interest them. An added bonus to using electronic book cover images is that some of the older editions may circulate better when introduced with an updated cover. Your PowerPoint booktalk can be saved as a Web page and posted to the school Web site. That way, students can refer back to the titles you discussed. For a sample genre booktalk on PowerPoint, see my booktalk wiki, referenced below.

#### BOOKTALK 2.0: BLOGS AND WIKIS

The next step in 21st-century learning is doing booktalks using Web 2.0. Employing a new tool, besides the sometimes over-used PowerPoint, can renew student interest while increasing learning (Loertscher and Achterman, 2003, p. 8). The interactivity of Web 2.0 allows students to respond actively and provides a chance for students to reconnect after they have read the book. For example, put your booktalk on a blog. Then give the book to an interested student and ask him or her to post a reaction on the blog. I call this the *one-book club*. The blog can be set up to notify participants every time there is a new comment, thereby creating an online conversation that does not require a physical space. It also means that not everyone has to read the same book at the same time. Using a Web-based format also allows you to link to other sources such as author sites, reviews on Amazon.com, and related items of interest. See Megan Fuller's Guys Read blog referenced below for a good example.

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As an extension of my genre booktalks, I have collaborated with my library-technician colleague, Tommy Kovac, on many lists for "read-alikes" and posted them on a wiki to share with others. The wiki is called Read If You Like. Readers with similar interests can work on lists collaboratively. For an example, see the reference below.

#### GET STUDENTS INVOLVED – WIKIS AND PODCASTS

The interactive nature of wikis allows students to read a book, decide the genre of a book they have read, and post the title to the appropriate list(s). When students have to classify their own reading by genre, they take their learning to the next level and demonstrate mastery of the concept. You can also use the wiki to solicit ordering suggestions from students. This provides another good incentive for them to make postings.

If you are ready to take the next step in 21st-century

booktalks, cutting-edge librarians are podcasting booktalks and creating video booktrailers. For an example, see Movie Trailers by Tucson/Pima Public Library teens, Sonja Cole's Book Wink site, and the University of Central Florida's Digital Booktalks, referenced below.

#### CONCLUSION

Teaching to standards can be fun. The humble booktalk can be transformed into a 21st-century learning experience. Use standards as a springboard to get teachers and students into the library more than ever before. Change their view of the library from a room full of books to a resource rich with links to standards. When teachers see the library in this way, they see your program as relevant to their work. When the teacher librarian or technician models ways to engage students with the new technologies, they inspire curiosity in teachers to acquire new technology skills to transform their own teaching.

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HEATHER GRUENTHAL is the teacher librarian at both Western HS and Orangeview JHS in the Anaheim Union HSD. She can be reached at [gruenthal\\_H@auhsd.us](mailto:gruenthal_H@auhsd.us).



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