

Booktalking

What is booktalking?

Booktalking is a programming activity that allows librarians to share their pleasure in books with a young audience. Although not the exclusive province of young adult librarians, booktalking has traditionally been associated with teens. Margaret A. Edwards, often called the “patron saint of young adult librarianship,” passionately advocates the practice in her classic, *The Fair Garden and the Swarm of Beasts: The Library and the Young Adult*.

Technically, booktalking can be defined as any interaction between the librarian and a patron in which the former suggests reading material for the latter. In this case, however, booktalking will be defined as a structured program during which the librarian presents a group of books to young adults as recommendations for both their reading pleasure and as a means of learning about or visiting with Latino/Hispanic youth. The venue may vary from a public librarian venturing into a school or scout meeting to speak, a school librarian going into a classroom to speak, or to either type of librarian hosting a program that brings patrons into the school or public library.

How to begin

More than likely, booktalking connected to *El día de los niños/El día de los libros*, will be a type of proactive programming. Some booktalks can be tied to a larger *El día de los niños/El día de los libros* celebration where children come to a central place, such as a library or a shopping mall, and participate in a host of activities planned to acknowledge their special day. In other cases, librarians will have to contact members of their community and ask if they can visit particular sites and conduct booktalks.

School librarians may find the most support in language arts or social studies classrooms by showing that their booktalks encourage pleasure reading or supplement a curriculum study of child labor laws, diversity in society, or the status of children. Public librarians may also want to venture into the schools to promote their own dual language or translated books. They may also find receptive audiences with other traditional partners, such as La Raza, the Boy/Girl scouts, homeschoolers, and local literacy foundations.

Those not familiar with booktalking, or those who simply want to brush up on their skills, can consult the books and Web sites listed at the end of this selection. Although the temptation to use someone else’s prepared booktalk is an appealing one, such canned scripts frequently fail to show the points in a book you want to emphasize and are better at conveying someone else’s pleasure in a book rather than your own.

Preparing the booktalk

When preparing booktalks, librarians must be conscious of the estimated number of participants, the ideal length of the booktalk, and the purpose of the booktalk. Although teens may not choose to borrow books immediately after the booktalk, there should be enough copies available and titles mentioned to give them this opportunity. Consider that an ideal time slot for teens is about thirty minutes, divide that number by the number of books to include in the talk, and you’ll come up with an average amount of time to spend on each book. When preparing the booktalk, remember that a series of talks all of the same length can become repetitious and that some books may require a longer time to set up the situation, plot, or characters, while other books may only require a brief

sentence for introduction. For example, after introducing *The House on Mango Street (La casa en Mango Street)* by Sandra Cisneros, a librarian could mention that *Caramelo (Carmelo, o, puro cuento)* is another book by the same author.

Encouraging teens to read should be the overriding goal in planning any booktalking program. Consequently, books should be selected according to both potential appeal and topic. The topic may be general, such as “summer reading,” or it may be specific, such as books about the Second World War. In the example below, the topic is Latino/Hispanic youth who have in some way not been honored, either by their family members, peers, or the larger societal and governmental community. The books listed below all contain either elements of appeal or of literary merit, both of which work to satisfy teen readers and encourage them to explore reading further.

Booktalks will vary with the presenter, the theme, and the audience. For example, a booktalk on *Esperanza Rising (Esperanza renace)* could stress family ties, or the conditions of migrant workers, or the prejudice faced by immigrants, or the maturity of a single girl. Booktalks prepared by another individual fall flat, and fail to convey that excitement among readers.

Presenting the booktalk

Librarians presenting booktalks should themselves be enthusiastic about books, knowledgeable about the books presented, and energetic. While discussions of each book do not have to end with cliffhangers, they should contain honest elements about the books that would entice kids to read.

Since teens may not immediately borrow books included in a booktalking program, librarians should consider ways to help them remember the selections mentioned. Hazel Rochman, author of *Tales of Love and Terror: Booktalking the Classics, Old and New*, suggests that after the program librarians keep the booktalked books on a separate book truck in the library for a couple of days. That way, youngsters can easily find recommended titles. Other librarians might consider using the books as part of a current, circulating display. The most lasting reminder is a printed list of books discussed. Consider using a blank bookmark template as a forum for listing books or making a sheet, with *El día de los niños/El día de los libros* logo on it, to serve as a bibliography of discussed books.

Librarians fluent in both Spanish and English have the flexibility to give booktalks in one or the other language or as a series of bilingual booktalks. (Sample bilingual booktalks are available at the Northern California chapter of REFORMA’s Web site at <http://www.bibliotecasparalagente.org/titles.html>.) Librarians with only one language have fewer options, but should not ignore this programming tool simply because of language limitations. If they are speaking to a group with little English, such librarians may ask a member of the community to give a simultaneous translation. Nevertheless, it’s important to remember that teens frequently have a grasp of English, even though this may be their second language, and will not be automatically put off or insulted if the booktalker only speaks English. The focus here is on the recommended books, not the language facilities of the librarian.

Suggested books

These books listed below have been chosen because they address Latino/Hispanic youth who have in some way not been honored, either by their family members, peers, or the larger societal and governmental community. There are enough suggestions to satisfy a gathering of approximately twenty to thirty young adults. Note that not every book will be appropriate for every age group.

Abelove, Joan. *Go and Come Back*.

Allende, Isabel. *City of the Beasts*.
La ciudad de las bestias.

Alvarez, Julia. *Before We Were Free*.
Antes de ser libre.

Alvarez, Julia. *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*.

Anaya, Rudolfo. *Bless Me, Última*.
Bendíceme, Última.

Atkin, S. Beth. *Voices from the Fields: Children of Migrant Farmworkers Tell Their Stories*.

Bretón, Marcos. *Home Is Everything: The Latino Baseball Story*.

Buss, Fran Leeper. *Journey of the Sparrows*.

Cameron, Ann. *Colibri*.

Castañeda, Omar S. *Imagining Isabel*.

Cisneros, Sandra. *The House on Mango Street*.
La casa en Mango Street

Cisneros, Sandra. *Carmelo*.
Carmelo, or, Puro Cuento: A Novel.

Cofer, Judith Ortiz. *The Meaning of Consuelo*.

Garland, Sherry. *In the Shadow of the Alamo*.

Hart, Elva Treviño. *Barefoot Heart: Stories of a Migrant Child*.

Herrera, Juan Felipe. *CrashBoomLove: A Novel in Verse*.

Hinojosa, Maria. *Crews: Gang Members Talk to María Hinojosa*.

Jenkins, Lyll Becerra de. *Celebrating the Hero*.

Jenkins, Lyll Becerra de. *The Honorable Prison*.

Jiménez, Francisco. *The Circuit: Stories from the Life of a Migrant Child*.
Cajas de cartón

Jiménez, Francisco. *Breaking Through*.
Senderos fronterizos

Martínez, Victor. *Parrot in the Oven: Mi Vida*.
El loro en el horno: mi vida

McColley, Kevin. *The Walls of Pedro García*.

Meyer, Carolyn. *Rio Grande Stories*.

Mikaelsen, Ben. *Sparrow Hawk Red*.

Mora, Pat, ed. *Love to Mamá: A Tribute to Mothers*.

Ortiz Cofer, Judith. *An Island Like You: Stories of the Barrio*.
Una isla como tú: historias del barrio.

Ortiz Cofer, Judith. *Silent Dancing: A Partial Remembrance of a Puerto Rican Childhood*.
Bailando en silencio: escenas de una niñez puertorriqueña.

Osa, Nancy. *Cuba 15*.

Rice, David. *Crazy Loco: Stories*.

Rivera, Tomás. *Y no se lo tragó la tierra / And the Earth Did Not Devour Him*.

Ryan, Pam Muñoz. *Esperanza Rising*.
Esperanza renace.

Saldaña Jr., Rene. *Finding Our Way: Stories*.

Saldaña, Jr. Rene. *The Jumping Tree: A Novel*.
Santiago, Danny. *Famous All Over Town*.
Santiago, Esmeralda. *Almost a Woman*.
Casi una mujer.
Santiago, Esmeralda. *When I was Puerto Rican*.
Cuando era puertorriqueña.
Stavans, Ilan, ed. *Wáchale!: Poetry and Prose about Growing Up Latino in America*.
Soto, Gary. *The Afterlife*.
Soto, Gary. *Buried Onions*.
Soto, Gary. *Canto Familiar*.
Soto, Gary. *A Summer Life*.
Soto, Gary. *Taking Sides*.
Tomando partido.
Temple, Frances. *Grab Hands and Run*.
Thomas, Piri. *Down These Mean Streets*.
Por estas calles bravas.
Veciana-Suarez, Ana. *The Flight to Freedom*.
Winick, Judd. *Pedro and Me: Friendship, Loss and What I Learned*.

Extension

Have a group of young adults prepare booktalks for their peers or for younger students. Define a topic, have each youngster prepare a booktalk script, and have the group present the booktalks at *El día de los niños/El día de los libros* celebrations.

Booktalking resources

Suggested books

Bodart, Joni Richards. *Booktalking the Award Winners: Young Adult Retrospective Volume*.
Broman, Jennifer. *Booktalking that Works*.
Edwards, Margaret Alexander. *The Fair Garden and the Swarm of Beasts*.
Jones, Patrick. *Connecting Young Adults and Libraries: A How-To-Do-It Manual*. 2nd Edition.
Rochman, Hazel. *Tales of Love and Terror: Booktalking the Classics, Old and New*.

Suggested Web sites

YALSA Professional Development Center/Professional Development Topics/Booktalking.
<http://www.ala.org/ala/yalsa/professionaldev/booktalking.htm>