



Diane Titcher Journal

From Page 217

Choosing Books and Forming Groups

As she conducted a Literature Circle inquiry with her class, Diane kept an informal email journal which she shared with Smokey weekly. To read Diane's journal in its entirety, [click here](#). To read a specific excerpt which links directly to the chapter, [read on](#).

MARCH 13

Thursday—the kids were chomping at the bit to pick their books. We have reading at the end of the day, and they kept putting “On Strike” signs on their desks anytime we started another subject during the day. :-) The way our schedule is structured, it really was best to keep reading at the end of the day, so I coaxed, bribed, and cajoled them back to work with each transition.

Reading time finally arrived and I had 22 of the most attentive kids I think I've had all year, sitting at their desks with looks of great anticipation on their faces. (Pause here to appreciate the moment - ;-)) I handed out the book ballots I made up for them and explained the process we would be following to choose books. I strongly emphasized that this was not about choosing the same book as a friend. I explained that it was definitely in their best interest to choose the books they most wanted to read, rather than what their friends wanted, since they would be spending the next several weeks working in these books and wouldn't want to be struggling in a book they didn't like. I also told them there were no guarantees they would get their first choice, so even if they tried to get in a group with a friend, it likely wouldn't work. Then, (keeping reality in focus) I told them we were going to go through the whole process without talking, signing, or passing notes.

I went through all of the book talks, holding up each book as I talked about it. I closely watched the kids' faces, trying to read in their expressions whether these books captured their interest, or if after all that anticipation, they weren't all that interesting after all. Fortunately for me, even after just two books, kids were squirming with excitement and beginning to whine that it was going to be too hard to choose. When I finished the book talks, I asked the kids to list their top three choices on the left side of the book titles on the ballot.

After the book talks, I explained how they would preview the books. I split the kids into groups of three, with one group of four. Their current seating arrangement actually worked very well for this, since I could divide most of the desks into sets of three and not have close friends together in a group. I gave each student in each group a different book and told them they had two minutes to look it over - going over all the things they like/need to consider when choosing a book. During this



time, the kids were reading the covers, paging through looking at text size, chapter length, etc., reading a random page or two, reading the first page or two, and deciding if they felt they could handle the book. Then every two minutes, the kids passed the books. After the kids had previewed all three books they started with, I swapped their books and repeated the process. The whole process went extremely smoothly except for in two groups. In one group, they glanced over the books for probably thirty seconds or so and then passed them. So at the end of the first two minutes, they said they had already previewed all their books. Needless to say, I had them go back through the books and take a closer look. The other group that had some problems was the group of four. They didn't pass their books all in one direction, so when we got to the last two minutes, there were a couple of kids who hadn't seen the same book. That was an easy fix—I just gave them another copy.

After they previewed all six books, I asked them to write their final choices in the blanks to the right of the book titles, and told them that if they felt VERY strongly about one book, they could put the number one by it and circle it. It was interesting to see that several kids did change their picks from the ones they chose after the book talks. (I should also note here that a few kids wrote down choices on both sides of their sheets before I even did the book talks! I encouraged them to erase them and think carefully about their choices after they learned more about the books, since prior to receiving their ballots, they had never even heard the titles. I think one or two kids kept those first choices, despite my advice. You know those kids - they squirm in their seat, cover their papers, turn them over, or drop them every time you walk by their desk so you can't see that they worked ahead.)

Fortunately the end of the day had arrived, so I didn't have to hear their pleas and see their sad, "puppy dog" eyes because I couldn't tell them which book they got right there on the spot. I took home their ballots and sorted through them, grouping and regrouping, trying to anticipate which kids would be best at supporting my lower readers, which kids would be best at keeping my "wanderers" focused, which kids would have plenty of patience with those who can be overeager (and overbearing), and for my low readers, which books I thought they could reasonably handle with a little bit of support. Of course every time I thought I had it all worked out, I would see a group that practically screamed, "Oh no—you don't want to put us together!" and have to regroup again. That being said, now that the kids are grouped, I feel pretty confident that they will work well together.

Friday morning the kids came in wanting to know if I had their book groups set up. I said yes, but I couldn't tell them right away because our visiting police officer was coming in to do their next D.A.R.E. lesson. The "On Strike" signs appeared again. I laughed and told them they could be on strike if they wanted, but that I couldn't tell them their books until after their D.A.R.E. and math lessons were done, so if they stayed on strike for too long, it would be Monday before they knew. I've never seen my kids put things away and get ready for the next activity so quickly! :-)

Before I told them their books, I explained that once they knew what book they were in, they needed to get together with their group and establish some ground rules for their meetings. We brainstormed possible topics to be covered in the ground rules and I wrote them on the overhead. I read off the groups, with a wonderful chorus of sounds playing in the background (“YES!”, “All right!, etc.) and had the groups get together in meeting spots scattered around our room. They used the rest of our time on Friday morning to come up with their rules, as well as consequences for not following them. In walking around and listening in, I noticed that several groups had decided to charge our “class bucks” for violating their rules. However, they were getting a little carried away and charging bucks for every infraction, such as every time someone interrupts someone else. I cautioned them about this, pointing out that they didn’t want to spend all their meeting time keeping track of how many bucks they each owed, and we talked about the fact that sometimes we are just so excited that we interrupt unintentionally, or sometimes we think the other speaker is done and didn’t intend to interrupt at all. After that brief discussion, the groups modified their rules, however, after looking them over this weekend, we may still have some work to do on this.

I gave the kids their books and many were saying, “I’m going to read the whole book this weekend—I so want to know what happens!” One student, Hannah, said, “Yeah, I’m going to read the first fifteen pages we agreed to and keep my thinknotes for those pages, and then read the rest of the book.” I was so glad she said that because I hadn’t thought about how much their thinking would change after they’ve read the whole book. So I gave them two VERY important things to remember:

1. Even if you read ahead, you need to keep your thinknotes all the way through (and we discussed why).
2. Don’t give away the ending to your classmates!

The kids are really very, very excited to read these books, which makes me feel great. I don’t think I’ve ever seen any of my students, in any class, as excited as these kids were on Friday.