

Book Response Makeover

Student Book Review Project

THE MEDIUM – WINTER 2009

Carlene Walter
SSLA Executive Member



SASKATCHEWAN SCHOOL LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

Book Response Makeover

Student Book Review Project

The Willow Awards

Saskatchewan Young Readers' Choice (SYRCA) promotes reading by granting a Willow Award (<http://www.willowawards.ca>) to the Canadian books voted by Saskatchewan students to be the best of those nominated in designated categories for a specific year.

In an effort to encourage participation by all children, regardless of the level at which they are reading, three awards have been established by SYRCA:

- The Shining Willow Award for books written for young readers.
- The Diamond Willow Award for titles written for upper elementary readers (grades 4-6).
- The Snow Willow Award for books for young people in grades 7 - 9.

Participation in the Willow Awards is free to Saskatchewan students. Students may vote in any category in which they have read the minimum number of books required. Individual ballots or class tallies of individual votes may be submitted. Ballots and how to vote for the current Willow Awards may be found at <http://www.willowawards.ca/nominated-books>.

The Project – An Overview

As the Willows nominated books are being read, guide students to reflect upon their understandings, their questions, and their connections to the read material. Opportunities to dialogue personal responses and evaluations of read material foster students' growth as a critical readers and writers.

To communicate their thinking to a global audience, students will post their reviews to a class or library blog. The blog posts can be text, visual (images), audio (podcasts), or a combination of these formats (videos and presentation software). If different schools are involved, the various blogs can be aggregated into a single platform. The resulting project will be showcased on the Saskatchewan School Library Association Site and submitted to SYRCA for Willow Award Project consideration.

The project consists of the following:

1. Deconstructing A Book Review
 - a. Evaluate professional book review
 - b. Develop criteria for analyzing and evaluating nominated Willow Award selections
2. Introduction Of The Willow Awards Nominated Selections
3. Guided Review
4. Blog Orientation
5. Reading and Blogging
6. Culmination and Celebration

Session One: Deconstructing A Book Review

1. Discuss the strategies students employ in deciding to borrow or buy a book:
 - The cover?
 - The summary?
 - Read an excerpt?
 - Recommended from a friend?
 - Favourite author or series?
2. Lead discussion to the role of a professional book reviewer.
3. Display book reviews from a variety of sources (published print journal, online journal, a book's endpapers, and/or a bookseller). Sample book reviews are available from [School Library Journal](#), [CM Magazine](#), and [Amazon](#). Reviews authored by students are available at [Reading Rainbow: Take a Look It's in a Book](#), [Spaghetti Book Club](#), [Scholastic: Share What You're Reading](#).
4. Collectively, students examine and identify the components of the shared book reviews:
 - The title and author are listed
 - A brief summary , without exposing the ending, is included
 - A critique of the book is offered (strengths and weaknesses)
 - Connections to prior personal experiences or other read books are detailed.
 - Personal response is supported by evidence, including quotations and specific references
 - Recommendation of purchase is provided
 - The name of the reviewer is stated
5. Post the developed list and inform students that the criteria will be a guide for the creation of their own book reviews.

Session Two: Introducing The Willow Award Nominated Selections

1. Display the Willow Award book nominees. Students browse the different books and choose one that they would be interested in reading.
2. Remind students of the discussion in the first session in which identified qualities for choosing books. Encourage students to read the summary, flip through the book and read an excerpt, and examine the cover to provide a brief understanding of the story and to stimulate interest in the story.
3. Once selection is complete, students visit the [Willow Award site](#) to read the linked online reviews of their chosen book.
4. Refer to the student generated list of book review criteria generated in Session One. Students evaluate the book review using these criteria.
5. Share the evaluations as a group. Modify the criteria if needed.

Session Three: Guided Review

1. Read aloud a short picture book selected from the Shining Willows nominated booklist.
2. Set a purpose for listening by asking students to be prepared to collectively create a book review.
3. While reading, stop periodically to invite connections and personal reflections.
4. After reading, students share their thoughts about the story.

5. Provide guided assistance to crafting the book review. Write the title and author of the story at the top of the chart paper. Students collaboratively construct the remainder of the review. Ask students to refer to the list of book review features generated in Session 1 to help determine the necessary components of the review.
6. Save the review for the next session.

Session Four: Blog Orientation

1. Prior to the students' arrival, set up a library or classroom blog using one of the following popular blogging platforms:

Edublogs - <http://edublogs.org/>

Blogger - <http://www.blogger.com>

WordPress - <http://wordpress.org/>

2. Many people may be familiar with the term "blog", but it is important to clarify its purpose as to dispel misconceptions. Will Richardson defines a blog as an easily created and updateable Web site that is defined by its ability to
 - Publish content instantly and chronologically
 - Update content regularly
 - Interact with its readers through posting of comments
 - Syndicate content via RSS feeds
3. Discuss the impact of the school's Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) and digital responsibility has upon this project. The conversation should delve deeper than the protection of the student (omission of full names and personal information), but include responsibility and appropriateness. Many of the blogs help vet unwanted visitors to the site by having comments being approved by the administrator (teacher or teacher-librarian) before the post is available on the site. Students may choose to use only first name or a pseudonym. The use of photographs of students, email addresses, age, and other sensitive material are often not permitted on school blogs.
4. Demonstrate the blog hosting site chosen for the project.
5. Discuss the ways in which the blog will be used to publish the students' book reviews.
6. Demonstrate publishing a post by submitting the collaboratively written Shining Willow book review written in Session Three.

Note:

If the creation of a blog is not possible, there are many sites online that feature student book reviews:

- Scholastic's "[Share What You're Reading](#)" allows students to [Write a Review](#) and also [Read Book Reviews](#) written by students at their same grade level.
- [Amazon](#) allows students to post their own reviews.

Subsequent Sessions: Reading and Blogging

1. In subsequent sessions, students continue to read their self-selected Willow Award nominated book or craft their book review to be posted on the blog.
2. To assist students construction of a book review, incorporate mini-lessons such as:
 - Citing sources (hyperlinks and citation styles)
 - Responding to posts of your book review
 - Revising a book review. ReadWriteThink's [Role-Play Book Reviews](#) can be used to model this process
 - Providing guided practice in using the reading comprehension strategies (Keene, 2008)
 - Offering feedback to peers' posts
 - Posting book reviews in other formats than text:
 - Showcasing other possibilities beyond text for book reviews. Many blog platforms allow podcasts, slideshows, and videos to be embedded. Try Voicethread, Slideshow, and Audacity to give your blog extra pizzazz!
3. Throughout the sessions, find opportunities to conference with students as they construct their reviews. Provide feedback on students' ability to create an enticing lead, determine importance of the story and integrate these points into their review, and incorporate the criteria of book review features identified in the first session. If students require further support, refer students to the ReadWriteThink' [Book Review Template](#) and [How to Write A Better Webblog](#).

Culminating Session: Culminating and Celebrating

1. Students submit their vote for their favourite Willow Awards nominated book using the [online submission forms](#). Votes must be submitted by February 28, 2009.
2. Celebrate the students' reading with a small token of appreciation, such as a book!

Bibliography

Keene, E. (2008). *To Understand: New Horizons in Reading Comprehension*. Chicago: Heinemann.

Mahoney, D. (2002, February 22). *A List Apart: Articles: How to Write a Better Weblog*. Retrieved December 11, 2008, from <http://www.alistapart.com/stories/writebetter/>.

Manning, E. (n.d.). *ReadWriteThink: Lesson Plan: Two Thumbs Up! Get Students Writing and Publishing Book Reviews*. Retrieved December 11, 2008, from http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=976.