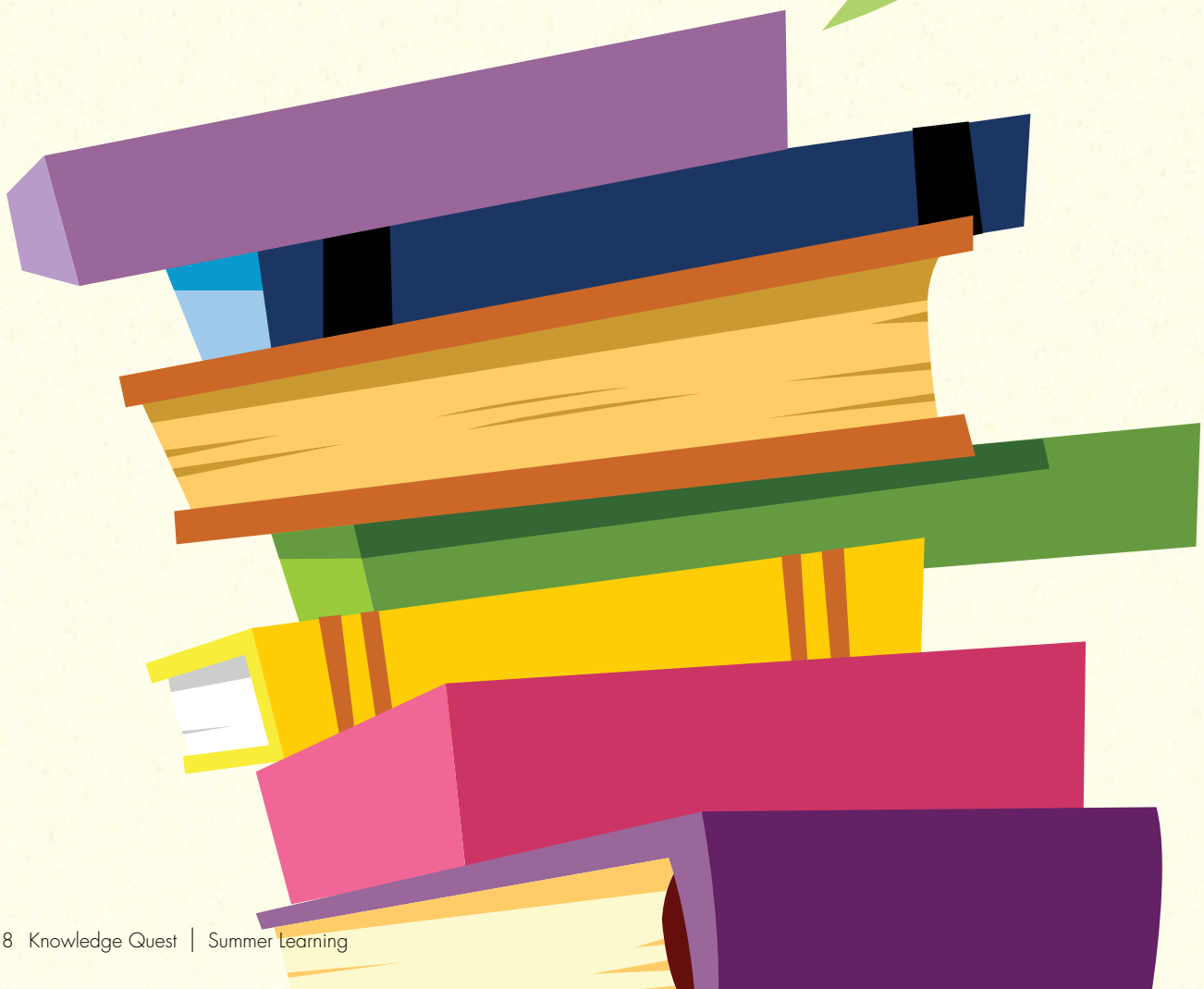
FEATURE

Booktalking
Avoiding Summer Drift

Jeff Whittingham
Jeffw@uca.edu

Wendy A. Rickman
wrickman@uca.edu



Why Booktalk?

Summer drift, otherwise known as loss of reading comprehension skills or reading achievement, has been a well-known and well-documented phenomenon of public education for decades. Before the 1980s researchers focused on the loss of reading achievement occurring during the academic school year. Since the 1980s, multiple studies have shown that literacy scores for economically advantaged students remain the same or show minimal increases during the summer months while students in low socioeconomic areas demonstrate a decline (Alexander, Entwisle, and Olson 2007; Allington and McGill-Franzen 2003; Allington et al. 2010; Cooper et al. 1996; Entwisle, Alexander, and Olson 1997; Hayes and Grether 1983). Summer drift has been identified as the culprit for lowering reading achievement levels.

Attrition of literacy levels for low socioeconomic and low-achieving students mostly occurs during the summer break. Research has shown a loss of up to 1.5 grade levels attributed to summer drift from first grade through fifth grade (Alexander, Entwisle, and Olson 2007). A three-year study by Susan Roman and Carol D. Fiore demonstrated that when left to voluntary participation, fewer students who received free and reduced-price lunches participated in summer reading programs. The study further indicated that students who did participate in summer reading programs demonstrated higher reading achievement scores both at the beginning of the school year and in the following spring, as well as increased confidence in the classroom (2010).

Studies from the late twentieth century to the present have demonstrated a slowdown in summer drift attributed to specific summer reading programs addressing motivation through student choice, student ownership, and teacher/parent scaffolding. Scaffolding, or support given to students during the learning process, includes activities such as booktalks, vocabulary development, reading ladders, book groups, and anything else providing support for students' independent reading. Specifically, the most successful slowdown of summer drift happens with the combination of matching student interests and providing continuous scaffolding. According to research by James S. Kim and Thomas G. White the missing ingredient for effective summer programming is student interest matching and teacher/parent scaffolding (2011). Further, Sherri L. Horner and Craig S. Shwery have noted that through various methods of coaching and scaffolding teachers can help students develop self-regulated reading skills; this improvement, in turn, helps

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students become motivated in their reading (2002). One very useful tool to address student interest and provide scaffolding is the use of booktalks.

Independent reading is important during the summer months when students are not being extrinsically motivated by grades or guided toward reading by teachers or school librarians. In the summer, reading requires intrinsic motivation. Successful booktalking by school librarians can help provide the intrinsic motivation students need to read independently during the months they are out of school. Pamela K. Dahl reported that students being presented with booktalks increased the number of pages read independently (1988). Her study indicated that the absence of booktalks led to decreased numbers of pages read independently. School librarians wishing to motivate students to read during the summer should consider using booktalking as a tool.

In today's society filled with the Internet, social media, and instant gratification, it is important to remember that students of all ages are constantly bombarded with information (Diamant-Cohen and Levi 2009). Because of this constant barrage of information—and distraction—school librarians must work to get the attention of their patrons. Well-planned and executed booktalks are one way in which school librarians can get this attention.

What to Include

Deb Aronson has told us that "in booktalking, a teacher or librarian provides an oral introduction, or sales pitch for a handful of books. Each pitch lasts just one or two minutes, but long enough to make students want to pick up the book and try it out" (2012). It is important to keep booktalks short so that students do not experience fatigue that might cause their interest to wane. Joni Bodart believes the first and last sentences of a booktalk are the most important. She has suggested that, to avoid losing the audience, booktalkers get to the most important part of the story by the second sentence. She also believes the last sentence should grab the audience's attention by implying something important is going to happen and they will miss it unless they read the book (1980).

Selecting appropriate books for a booktalk requires attention to detail. While booktalks often highlight new additions to the library collection, booktalks can also motivate audiences to read good books that might be overlooked in a well-developed collection (Schall 2005). School librarians' booktalks are frequently aimed at reluctant readers and focused on easily accessible text that fosters independent reading on a very narrow band of ability and interest. School librarians should remember that enthusiasm expressed in a booktalk can develop interest and motivate students to read material more advanced than the learners' nominal reading levels (Rochman 1987).

Successful booktalking by school librarians can help provide the intrinsic motivation students need to read independently during the months they are out of school.

How to Booktalk

Once audience-appropriate books have been selected, following a few simple guidelines can make booktalks successful:

- Always read the books you plan to booktalk. Your audience will recognize an imposter.

- Do not oversell the books. Give the audience just enough and leave the rest to them.
- Make connections. If you connect to the book, then chances are the audience will too.
- Never give away the ending! Leave the audience wanting more.
- A booktalk is not a review. Give the audience the facts and let readers form their own opinions.
- A booktalk is not a plot summary. Give just enough detail to hook the reader.
- Keep it short. Give the facts and move on.
- Practice the booktalks. You will feel more relaxed and enthusiastic, increasing listeners' engagement.
- Have fun! Your audience will not be motivated unless they enjoy the presentation.

Following these guidelines will help you conduct successful booktalks.

When to Present

School librarians must think about when and how students will access summer booktalks. To build a foundation for summer reading, booktalks can be presented near the end of the school year. Alternatively, the talks can be part of a summer reading program. Additionally, school librarians might create booktalks using free web-based screen-recorder sites such as Screencast-o-matic.com or Screenr.com. Recorded booktalks can then be posted to the library's website throughout the summer.

No matter the format, delivered personally or electronically, booktalks used for scaffolding can motivate independent reading and foster interest in books beyond what students ordinarily read during the summer. This motivation and interest can, in turn, help avoid the summer drift experienced by many students.

Jeff Whittingham *is an associate professor at the University of Central Arkansas. He coauthored "Developing Independent Readers with Audiobooks" in the October 2014 issue of* Association of Middle Level Education Magazine *and authored "Reading Motivation: A Study of Literature Circles" in the Summer 2014 issue of* Academic Exchange Quarterly.

Wendy Rickman *is an assistant professor at the University of Central Arkansas. She was awarded the 2014 Pat McDonald Outstanding Individual Achievement Award from the Arkansas Association of Instructional Media. A member of AASL, she is also the immediate past-chair of the Arkansas Association of School Librarians.*

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