

How a second grade teacher got her class to read 350 chapter books — for fun!



THE **B.B.B.C.**

You are probably wondering what these letters stand for. Well, let me tell you. The letters stand for Bakkila’s Best Book Club. A few years ago a parent asked me how to motivate children to read more and, in particular, chapter books. Now, being a reading specialist and a second grade teacher, I understood that children gravitate toward picture books. While I love picture books and find them so intriguing, I knew the value of moving on to fewer pictures, more words, and longer chapters.

Before I explain how the book club works, let me just tell you that in the first year of the club, my class of twenty-two second grade students read over 350 chapter books. Interested? Well, the first thing I had to do was figure out how to motivate my young readers. Keeping my class budget in mind, I had to find inexpensive incentives. My first year, I gave fifteen minutes of free time for every book read. I soon realized that I did not have enough free time in my week to give out, because some children read more than one book a week. Next, I found plastic charms and small chains from a company called Good Stuff. This was just the ticket.

My next mission was to develop a class library of the “perfect”

chapter books. I started with *The Magic Tree House*, *A-Z Mysteries*, and *Encyclopedia Brown* series. These books covered reading levels from second through fourth grade. This allowed for differentiating reading levels within the classroom. My real goal was to foster the love of reading, not just to assign book reports.

I also wanted to be sensitive to each individual’s needs. So, my first step was to visit our librarian. She helped me start my own small library. I still needed more books to select from, so I asked my parents and found them very willing to donate books. After three years, I have well over

200 books.

Once I made the book selections, I noticed that most of these chapter books were around 100 pages. This became the benchmark — for every 100 pages, one charm is earned. This was attainable for all reading levels. In fact, if a child chose to read a book of two or three hundred pages they earned two or three charms. Many chose to read the series, *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, since it is so popular. In order to promote reading, I allow the children total freedom to choose their own book. If they have a chapter book from home, they may choose to read it. It does not have to come from the class library.

LESLIE BAKKILA

2nd Grade

Peninsula Heritage School

lbakkila@peninsulaheritage.org

You might ask how I know if the child actually read the book, because reading is a totally independent activity. I designed a short form that only required a small picture, and a few lines to capture the heart of the story. Each child chose a book to read independently at home, as often as they wanted. Parents actually told me that their child carried their book everywhere: to restaurants, in the car, to grandma's house, and even upstairs to bed. They became "readaholics." Success! Since I wanted to promote reading for pleasure, the short report was just perfect.

Since a parent signature was required on the finished reading form, each parent had to spend some time either reading, or talking with their child about each book. I found this idea grew into a cherished rou-

tine with parent and child each evening. I received very positive feedback from the parents. Some parents told me that when they were reading newspapers and magazines themselves, their children automatically started reading their books.

Once the book is read and the short report has been filled out and signed, what happens next? The proud student stands in front of the class with the book in hand, and gives the short review. In just two minutes, ideas have been shared. The student turns in the form which I place in a special box so other children may come up at any time and read the review to decide whether to read that book or not. Each morning, usually one or two students come up to share their reviews. It is very enriching for everyone. I felt this was a more genuine way to discuss a

book. In fact, it is just a kind of review I do in my adult book club.

The student chooses a charm and places it on a chain, which continues to grow as each new charm is added. I made sure that the chains are short enough, so they are not used as necklaces, or even bracelets. I felt this might become a safety issue. I put a small plastic Command hook on the inside corner of each desk, so they can proudly hang their chains from their desk. They loved this. So what if they play with the chain? They are reading. You might wonder how students feel when some have earned many charms and some earn few. The truth is they really don't care. In fact, they are just happy readers. We celebrate one or fifty charms, because reading is really all that counts.



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