

Hey, Can We Read that Book? It Sounds Interesting!

Jessica Lantz, James Madison University

Joy Myers, James Madison University

Pamela Sullivan, James Madison University

The practice of book talking has a long history with librarians, teachers, and students engaging in these talks (Fischbach, 2004; Wozniak, 2011; York, 2008). The benefits of book talks can be seen on two levels: those for the individual student and those for the community. Some of the benefits for individual students are improved attitudes toward reading and lower achieving students reading more (Beard & Antrim, 2010). There is a great deal of research that suggests outside-of-school, independent reading is highly related to reading achievement (Alexander, Entwisle & Olson, 2007; Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2013) and that volume of reading is an important piece of overall literacy skill development (NCES, 2010). Successful reading experiences, with appropriate level and interesting content, has been shown to increase motivation to read (Allington, 2009).

On a community level, book talks allow readers to form what Donalyn Miller (2013) refers to as, a “network of other readers” who can support each other in choosing and discussing books. Students can find book talks to be a natural outlet for book responses, similar to book clubs. “Readers enjoy talking about books almost as much as they like reading” (Miller, 2013, p. xxiv). To this end, book talks can help increase the amount of voluntary reading by building motivation to read. Book talks that allow students to make their own choices of books may increase voluntary reading and therefore reading levels (Hunter, 2001).

A book talk is a quick and simple way to “hook” kids on books. Often the book talks follow a format similar to a movie trailer, catching kid’s interest and then providing a cliffhanger so that students are left wanting to know more and thus may be more likely to read the book. Typically book talks are not reviews, nor do they summarize the book, but they are an implied recommendation from the book talker.

The major benefit of a book talk is that students are exposed to a wider variety of titles, genres and authors than if they just perused the book shelves in your classroom (York, 2008). This is especially important for the students in your

classroom who typically pick out the same authors or genres. We know that several features of texts can help encourage voluntary reading, including genre, topic, length, and perceived difficulty level (Guthrie & Humenick 2004). When children are familiar with different authors and genres, it can help promote voluntary reading. In addition, book talks can support young children who are making the transition from beginning readers to chapter books by scaffolding understanding of comprehension strategies, such as inferences, while conducting a book talk (Jacobson, 2003). The authors have found other benefits in creating book talks in the classroom. Book talk creation can be a group or solo activity. They can also be created by partnerships of students in different grade levels. Book talks can be an exciting technology integration activity where the outcome is a project student's can be proud of and share with others.

General Book Talk Tips

It is essential to choose quality literature to discuss during a book talk (Eeds & Wells, 1989; Maloch, Zapata & Roser, 2012). Students will be able to talk from their hearts if they can relate to the character, the character's journey, or the topic. Often placing books in juxtaposition also invites talk. Choosing two books by the same author or two versions of the same story allows students to talk through the vantage point of comparison (Short, 2011). We must not forget about nonfiction texts, which students tend to connect with if the information is thick, accurate, and richly illustrated. Nonfiction texts offer students an opportunity to engage in a different kind of talk. Instead of overwhelming students with options, studies indicate that the most effective teachers help students find interesting, good fit books (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2013). They may do this by showcasing a few (3-5) options they think will appeal to the reader.

Digital Book Talk Tips and Examples

Recently, digital forms of book talking have gathered interest such as book trailers or short videos (Chance & Lesesne, 2012; Gunter & Kenney, 2008). Digital book talks provide an easy, personalized approach to supporting students' reading. Teachers may record book talks and make them available on the class website or through emails to parents of children for whom these books would be a particularly good fit. That is, those books whose authors, topics, genres, and difficulty levels are aligned with the student. Next, we share some images and book talk scripts created by elementary school teachers using digital tools.



Figure 1. Example of Tellagami book talk of *Words with Wings* created by A. Rutherford in Waynesboro City Schools.

Transcript: Have you ever had that feeling that others just don't understand? Grown-ups, other kids, your parents want to help, but they just don't get it. Words with Wings by Nikki Grimes tells the story of a girl coping with her reputation of being the "weird new girl" at school just after her parent's separation. The author's word choice and poetry format make the words flow smoothly. It is quick and easy read yet powerful and relatable. Individual words ignite Gabby's mind into daydream fantasies like the weightless adventure of flying through space as a comet or memories of better days like the simple comfort of swaying on great grandma's porch swing. The tone is so comfortable as if your best friend is lounging on the couch with you sharing all of her inner thoughts. Similar to many young girls, Gabby's mind jumps from emotion to emotion trying to make sense of it all. Add the book, join the life of this day-dreamer as she starts to figure things out. Stop by our school library and check out Words with Wings by Nikki Grimes today.



Figure 2. Example of Chatterpix book talk of *The Watermelon Seed* created by L. Leone in Waynesboro City Schools.

*Transcript: Have you ever swallowed a seed? Or wondered what might happen if you did? Well, in this super, funny story called *The Watermelon Seed* by Greg Pizzoli, an alligator shares how much he loves watermelon, but then he accidentally swallows a seed. He starts wondering what might happen to him and he comes up with some very silly ideas. If you like *Fly Guy* or *Elephant and Piggy* books you'd love this one! Read to find out just what happens to the alligator!*

When teachers create digital book talks, they are modeling the next step in taking book talks digital, having students create their own animated book talks on iPads in the classroom. Digital book talks can be differentiated for all ages, using different levels of books from picture to chapter books. Younger students may be helped by using a template for the script, but more mature readers may enjoy having the chance to write out their script and practice persuasive or descriptive writing. The students also enjoy working in grade level pairs or across different grade levels to make a shared book talk. These are all ways that book talks can be differentiated to meet students' needs.

Next, we share some other helpful tips. First, encourage students to pick a book they love and are excited to share with others. Take a picture of the book to use as the background of the book talk. The cover is a great choice, or a picture of

their favorite page. Next, pick out and personalize the character (if applicable) and think about how animating the character could enhance the script. Keep the book talk short. Thirty seconds can be enough time to say what is needed. Some of the apps may have time limits. If more time is needed for the book talk, upgrading the app might be required.

Additionally, it is important to create an engaging script so viewers will be interested in watching the book talk, and then be excited to go read the book themselves. We have developed some tips for creating engaging book talk scripts. First, think about what you want to say before you begin recording the book talk. Entice the audience to want to read the book and hook them right away perhaps by saying things, such as “Do you like suspenseful stories?” or “I’ve never been so drawn into a book’s world so quickly...” Or “If you like books by Mo Willems, you’ll love this one!” After the introduction, briefly describe the plot of the book while avoiding spoilers. You may choose to describe how you felt reading the book or highlight a particular moment or image in the book that encapsulates why you loved it. Wrap up the book talk by enthusiastically encouraging the audience to go read the book, right now. When the book talk is finished, it can be shared with other students, parents, on a class blog, or online for others to enjoy.

Resources for Digital Book Talks

When considering which iPad apps to choose for book talks, keep in mind several criteria: access, cost, and ease of use. The apps we highlight in this article are already used in many local schools and are free. In addition, most of the selected apps offer inexpensive paid versions with more features and recording time. Ease of use is an important consideration so teachers do not have to spend much time, if any, training the students on using each app. This allows the book talk creator to focus on making book talks instead of worrying about learning and troubleshooting the technology. Each of the apps we discuss next, Tellagami, Puppet Pals, and Chatterpix Kids not only fit the above criteria but they also allow for easy sharing and exporting of videos. Each app is summarized below.

- Tellagami <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/tellagami/id572737805?mt=8> (free, in-app purchases available). This app features a customizable animated character, a customizable background, and voiceover. The creator can take a picture of the book with the iPad camera and use this as the background of the video. The creator uses his or her own voice to do the voiceover. The character’s mouth animates along with the dialogue. Free version users are limited to 30 second videos. In-app purchases offer unlimited video length and additional character choices.

- Puppet Pals HD <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/puppet-pals-hd/id342076546?mt=8> (free, \$4.99 upgrade to Director's pass recommended). This app uses a picture of a character, which can be customized in the paid version to a cut-out character from any image. The background can be a picture of the book, taken using the iPad camera. The creator records a voiceover while moving the character around the background with their finger to animate the video. Multiple scenes are possible with the paid version.
- ChatterPix Kids <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/chatterpix-kids-by-duck-duck/id734046126?mt=8> (free). This app allows the creator to take a picture with the iPad camera, edit the image to include fun things like accessories and filters, and then record a voiceover. This app animates a moving mouth on top of the picture to make it look like the picture is narrating your voiceover.

Conclusion

In reading/writing communities, learners share responsibility in a collaborative social context (Smith & Bixler, 2009). By encouraging students and teachers to share the responsibility of creating book talks, teachers are making time and creating a place for discussion which is key to reflective and critical reading (Miller, 2013). This is essential due to the current classroom emphasis in the United States on test-taking and scripted approaches to language arts and reading comprehension. Through book talks, teachers share their own love of reading and inspire students to be readers (Ward & Day, 2016). We have demonstrated in this article the importance of book talks but more importantly how easy it is for teachers and students to turn traditional book talks into digital creations. We hope that you are inspired to try one of the iPads apps we described or better yet, have your students create their next book talk using one of them.

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