How to Start a Community Read

Do you want to engage young people, teachers, parents, librarians, and other community members in a common dialogue? Start a community read! Here’s how you can do it...

1. Set a timeline. Usually one month gives people enough time to read the books, participate in a book discussion, and plan to attend any events you are hosting.

2. Reach out to people in your community. Contact teachers and principals at all area schools (or even the school district supervisor), work with the public libraries, touch base with the local bookstore, colleges, churches, and talk to parents.

3. Ask local businesses to be corporate sponsors for the program so every person in the community—kids and adults—can read the book.

4. Ask the public library to create a display of the book and have copies available to lend.

5. Contact local bookstores and ask them to offer discounts on books and create prominent book displays.

6. Contact your local media—including newspapers, radio stations and television stations—to see if they’re interested in covering the community reads.

7. Publicize the community read in your school or library, on your website, put up reminder flyers everywhere in your community.

8. Book talk the books at your local schools and libraries and include information about your community reads program.

9. Schedule a community wide book discussion at your library or school. You might partner with a local bookstore and host an event with them.

10. Bring in a local expert to aid with discussion and introduce topics.

11. Distribute discussion guides and have other resources available for teachers and librarians to use. An author interview, quotes from educators, a full stage play, and other resources to help you use Thirteen Reasons Why as a community read are available at http://www.penguin.com/13RWcommunityread.

12. Individualize! We realize that not every community is the same, so put your own personal touch on this wonderful project!

Visit www.penguin.com/13RWcommunityread for more Thirteen Reasons Why resources and printables.
A Note from the Author:

When I wrote Thirteen Reasons Why, I felt confident that teens would understand and appreciate the ideas I wanted to talk about in the book. And I’ve received many inspiring letters from readers saying it made them more conscious of how they treat others, as well as the importance of really reaching out when they need help and not simply dropping hints. With adults, my fingers were crossed that they would see this as an opportunity to begin a dialogue with teens about some important issues. Thankfully, they’ve jumped at the chance. It’s been wonderful to hear about some of the conversations that have started. Of course, simply hearing that they’ve been wonderful to hear about some of the conversations is what I needed to find out. And I did find it. And I’m sorry.

Thirteen Reasons Why

by Jay Asher

I think I’ve made myself very clear, but no one’s stopping forward to stop me. A lot of you cared, just not enough. And that—that is what I needed to find out.

And I did find out.

And I’m sorry.

Clay Jensen does not want to have anything to do with the tapes his classmate and crush, Hannah, has left behind after committing suicide. Compelled to listen as she shares each act of cruelty or selfishness that contributed to her feelings of ostracism, Clay relives the pain Hannah felt, as her classmates’ lack of empathy becomes increasingly disturbing.

Common Core Connection:

Standard: Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

In haunting prose and page-turning suspense, Clay’s and Hannah’s stories unwind as her final days and hours are revealed on the cassette tapes she has left behind. Encourage students to keep a journal to record their feelings and reactions to the raw emotions that both characters reveal on the pages of Thirteen Reasons Why.

The online media for this book give readers multiple ways to interact with the content and characters, especially through links and artifacts on Hannah’s blog. From her journal to podcasts to video tributes, the emotional rawness of this book inspires creative responses that eulogize Hannah’s life. Have students work in teams to create timelines that feature memorable aspects related to the book’s theme and message by comparing and contrasting how Clay’s and Hannah’s characters change and evolve through the intertwined narratives shared in the book.

To learn more, visit www.thirteenreasonswhy.com and 13RWProject.com.

Activity and Discussion Prompts for Thirteen Reasons Why

1. First Impressions: We begin the book with the word, “Sir” and a question mark. In one word the author hints at questions of maturity for our main character, who, we later learn, is named Clay.
   • Explore the words that set the mood of this novel.
   • What else does the author do to entice reader participation?

Technology Integration: Find chapter samplers of some newly released YA titles online (Amazon, Goodreads, Scribd) How do the first pages of other novels accomplish the same task?

Correlates to Common Core Standards RL.CCR.4: Key Ideas and Details (College and Career Readiness Anchor Standard); RL.9-10.1, RL.9-10.3, RL.9-10.5.

2. You Are the Potter:
   • Create an impression of Clay listening to the tapes.
   • Write a poem or a word picture using several of the words or phrases from the very first page or section to create a mood that matches the book.

Technology Integration: Go to the website of a major classical art museum such as the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC. Find a portrait that will serve as a model for creating an interactive, multimedia poster of Hannah or Clay or yourself.

Note: Students may keep adjusting these posters as they move along in the book and they may add new characters as they meet them.

Correlates to Common Core Standards RL.9-10.3; W.9-10.3; W.CCR.4 (College and Career Readiness Anchor Standard).

3. Beware of Surprise Gifts: Clay is initially thrilled to receive a package, but quickly changes his tune.
   • With the entire class, discuss some potential consequences of Hannah’s tapes. Could the consequences be worse than she hoped?
   • Discuss in small groups and as a class whether or not the gift will do what Hannah expects.
   • What are the desired effects, and could there be other reasons?

Technology Integration: This may be a good time to read O. Henry’s “The Gift of the Magi” to understand how gifts often have unintended effects: http://www.online-literature.com/donne/1014/.

Correlates to Common Core Standards RL.9-10.2, RL.9-10.5, RL.9-10.7.

4. Where is my GPS?: Hannah directs Clay and other people on Hanah’s list to follow her personal journal by creating a map.
   • Make a map and include a key for places that signify important events in your life.

Technology Integration: Create an audio guided tour of your map, using a Walkman (ideally) or a smart phone. Use Google Maps to help create templates of your neighborhood. Imagine your neighborhood as Clay and Hannah’s neighborhood. Convert your icons to places mentioned on Hannah’s map.

Correlates to Common Core Standards SL.CCR.6 (College and Career Readiness Anchor Standard); ReadingTechnical Subjects, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, RH.CCR.4; ReadingTechnical Subjects, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, RH.CCR.7 (College and Career Readiness Anchor Standard); SL.9-10.1.

5. Following Rules: Hannah provides Clay with the rules for listening to her tapes and what to do with them upon completion.
   • Are these rules worth following? Discuss the rules from the perspective of the listeners.

Why would they send the tapes on?
   • Hannah hints that she has set up a method for ensuring compliance with her wishes.
   • Speculate and predict a course of action that would convince Clay to follow the rules.

Technology Integration: History is replete with rules requiring people to do odious actions. Search your school’s history database (or check with your public librarian) for examples of unfair rules. Report your findings.

Correlates to Common Core Standards ReadingTechnical Subjects, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, RH.CCR.7 (College and Career Readiness Anchor Standard); SL.9-10.4.