

Moving Red Clover Books From the Library To the Classroom, and Beyond by Kata Welch Librarian Cavendish Town Elementary School

Do you ever go to a conference and listen to what other people have done, and feel totally inadequate by comparison? I do. I've been going to Red Clover Conferences for years and watching other people talk about the wonderful things they do to get Red Clover Books out of the library and into classrooms and saying, "I'm going to do that, this year." Then for one reason or another, I haven't done it. This year, I decided to make it a priority.

In the past, if I knew that a specific book might have something to do with a teachers' curriculum, I suggested they use it, but I had never pushed the use of Red Clover books throughout the school. I knew that if this was going to work, I would need a second set of books. I had already received one set from the Mother Goose Program, and purchasing another one would have strained my budget. So I asked Building for Books, a local entity that tends to support the library to purchase me a second set. Peggy Svec, the head of the organization and a primary school teacher at CTES, was kind enough to authorize the purchase.

With that in place, I started the process towards the end of the 2009-2010 school year, making the books available and I asked the teachers to adopt one for the following year, if they felt it fit into their existing curriculum, and do some kind of project that they could document either in photos or through a product.

The second part of my plan was to modify the library blog as a central place with information about the books: student comments, classroom work, as well as a commentary on how the book was used in class. Further, I planned to discuss the books with my students when we read about the books in class and post their comments on the library blog.

What Worked?

I was lucky that the selection of books matched the curriculum of many of the teachers. All of the classroom teachers and many of the specials teachers were able to adopt a book. As of mid April, most of the teachers have used the book and have sent me pictures and text about their use of the book, which is posted on the blog as I receive it.

So far, the following has been done with the Red Clover Books:

Kindergarten used Redwoods, by Jason Chin, as a spring board for their study of a local tree.

The math teacher for grades Kindergarten, first and second has planned a money unit for this spring based on Pennies for Elephants, by Lita Judge.

Both the first and second grade literacy teacher and the physical education teacher have been catching kids being "do nothing dolls" based on yoga and Let's Do Nothing by Tony Fucile.

The third grade teacher has an artist in residency based on The Fantastic Undersea Life of Jacques Cousteau, by Dan Yaccarino, planned for the spring with a sea mural and lessons on how to draw sea life. Fourth grade is featuring Lousy Rotten Stinkin' Grapes, by Marge Palatini, as part of its folk tale unit. The fifth grade used Moonshot, by Brian Floca, in an earth, moon, sun unit and made original lunar vehicles based on their knowledge.

The sixth grade is planning a poetry unit and a poetry slam based on Button Up, by Alice Schertle. Our art teacher used An Eye for Color: The Story of Joseph Albers, by Natasha Wing to inspire classes to make art of a similar style, which will be seen at the annual Arts Night. CTES is lucky enough to be the recipient of many mini-grants through the Green Mountain Festival Series Arts in Education program. Some of the teachers elected to use their mini-grant

opportunity to pay for an artist in residence based around the book they adopted. I had a school-wide artist in residence based on Bubble Trouble, by Margaret Mahy.

I read the books to the students in grades K-4, and posted their comments on many of the books on the library blog.

I also did several art projects based on the book with the third and fourth grade students. Images of their work and the comments from the students may be found at www.cavendishlibrary.org/blog/. The inspiration for many of the projects was through the annual Red Clover Award Guide, which is put out by the Mother Goose project every year and is invaluable.

I used the “Cavendish Corner” (which is the bi-weekly school paper) to tell the parents about what we were doing, so they could follow along with the blog and the project. I also used the library’s Facebook page and Twitter account as well as press releases to publicize the project.

What didn’t work so well?

We had a lot of snow days this year. When I read the books to the students in library class, I stagger the classes so students may have a chance to take home a Red Clover Book. Because of the staggering and the snow days, it was a real rush to get the books read and voted on before the cutoff date for voting in early April. I had to have some classroom teachers read a few for me in the lower grades, to finish on time.

The posting of comments went pretty well, but I thought the younger kids in general, were more into agreeing with their friends rather than making their own comments, especially as the process went on. There were some books whose comments did not get posted, either because I was out, or because I misplaced my notes.

I wasn’t great about checking in with the teachers and posting their stuff on the blog as it was given to me.

What will I do when I do it again?

I would like to integrate more technology into this process, aside from the blog, such as using the school’s flip cameras, iMovie and “Prezis”. I would love to have the fifth and sixth grade students make book trailers based on the books. I want to team with someone like our local cable access channel, to help this happen.

I would like to revamp the comment process by asking only a few children what they think about the books, rather than the whole class.

Finally I will try to get more community involvement and a grant to have some kind of a celebration of the Red Clover Books at the end of the school year, where the community could see what the kids did.

Some advice if you want to try this:

- 1) Start small. The first time I tried this, I had a few teachers do it first.
- 2) Encourage teachers to add the books to existing curriculum. Make it as easy as possible for them.
- 3) Buy the Red Clover Award handbook; it’s full of ideas.
- 4) Use community resources for grants to purchase an extra set of the books.
- 5) Have a central place, like a blog, to view the progress and the products.

For more information about the Red Clover Books, see their website

http://www.mothergooseprograms.org/lit_red_clover_overview.php

The Cavendish Library Blog may be viewed at

<http://www.cavendishlibrary.org/blog/>