

Top Ten Tips for Coaching the Perfect Booktalk

Because you're an educator, we know you want your students to shine. We also know that reading, writing, and public speaking can be difficult for some students. Here are some tips to help students create booktalks they'll deliver with pride:

- 1) Be a booktalk model.** Show students how to perform a quality booktalk by performing them yourself, often and with enthusiasm. Let them see how much you love books and booktalking!
- 2) Let students booktalk books they really love.** Even if it's not what you would have chosen for them, allowing students to make their own decisions will increase their enthusiasm and ensure a genuine recommendation.
- 3) Give them time to work on their writing during class.** For some students, writing the booktalk can be the scariest part of the process. If time permits, let them do some of the writing in class, where you are available to offer guidance and support.
- 4) Encourage small-group rehearsals.** Speaking in front of large audiences can be difficult for even your most outgoing students. Have them practice in front of just a few other students, or one-one-one, until they feel comfortable enough to share with the whole class.
- 5) Promote strong listening skills.** Performing to a disinterested audience is a challenge. Remind students to be courteous – still, silent, and focused – while others booktalk. Don't forget the applause!
- 6) Ask prompting questions.** Sometimes, even well-rehearsed students freeze up. If a student is struggling to recall his booktalk, jump in and ask questions like, "What are some similar books to this?" or "What would you rate this out of ten?"
- 7) Allow notes when needed.** Although an ideal booktalk is so well rehearsed the speaker does not need written prompts, it's okay to permit students to read from notes if they need them. Quick notes and bullet points on index cards can be helpful for students to recall character names, dates, and other details they don't want to forget.
- 8) Create a positive booktalking environment in the room.** Post on your door a sign that reads, "Booktalks in Progress." Ask the school office to hold any notes or passes. Avoid interruptions.
- 9) Give positive feedback.** Even if a student forgets her cliffhanger, mispronounces the author's name, or never looks up from her notes, let her know you appreciate her effort and emphasize at least one thing she did well.
- 10) When possible, do not grade booktalks.** Booktalks are best when given as a true, joyful reaction to a book. When students are only focused on getting a good grade, they might put together performances that contain all the technical elements of giving a good booktalk, but lack passion. Try using booktalks as a tool to foster a love of reading.