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It is Important to be Friends with a Public Library: A Story of OBOB Collaboration

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Gesse: A girl comes into your library and asks you if you have a book. You look in the catalog and you see that there are 82 holds on the seven copies your system has. Uh-oh. "No problem" says the girl. "I have a whole list!" But as you go through it, title after title has a similar number of holds. Suddenly you realize: this is the Oregon Battle of the Books (OBOB) list!

If you work at public library, you might have had this experience and you might have tried to think about ways your library could do a better job of supporting schools participating in OBOB. This year, after reports of long hold lists and disappointed young patrons across the system, our youth services director decided to go ahead and purchase some book sets of OBOB titles for branch youth librarians to use with OBOBers. These books were cheaper paperback editions and wouldn't circulate in the general collection but could be given to students at library book clubs.

I was not part of this initial decision and wasn't sure I had time to do anything more than I was already doing. Then one day I started talking to Nanci Booher, the media specialist at the charter school nearby, who was carefully placing as many holds as possible on OBOB titles at our library and scrounging Half Price Books for inexpensive copies. She had a 4th–6th grade book club that was interested in trying out OBOB.

Nanci: This is my first go at OBOB and at an after-school book club. With Gesse's help, we planned a few meetings at the library. We talked about books, ate pie and the kids had the opportunity to check out books after our meeting was over. It was fun for me to have this group of students in a relaxed environment outside of school. Not all of my students knew each other (since they are in different grades) and it has been nice to see new relationships develop.

Gesse: It was great that Nanci would actually walk her students over, so I would have a built-in group of kids. Sometimes it is easier to take on a new program, if you have a guaranteed audience! We wanted our book club to be fun and balance OBOB preparation with general discussion. We would have a little trivia, but we would



also incorporate fun activities that would help kids remember the book in the long run while working on their literacy skills. Also, we were both committed to having thematic snacks. We had gummy worms and cookies for *Gregor the Overlander* and, as Nanci mentioned, pie for *Pie!* In addition to supporting OBOB, this book club was a great way to help students make a connection to their public library. These students always say ‘hi’ to me in the library now, and I know that they feel comfortable asking me for help with all manner of research and reader’s advisory questions.

Nanci: It was important for me to build a relationship with our neighborhood library because not only is it a good resource for our students, it’s a good resource for me. I can call Gesse and ask her opinion about just about anything ... the layout of my little library, book lists for my book club kids, ideas to incorporate in Battle of the Books. In return, Gesse knows that anytime she has a program or needs to recruit students for a program at the library, she has me to turn to and that I’ll get that information out to my students.

Gesse: Working with Nanci is great because when we pool our resources and know-how together everything stretches much further.

Nanci: It is a balancing act. Schools are short staffed and not all of them have the luxury of working with their neighborhood library. Public libraries are busy, busy places and the youth librarians not only have public schools to service, but they have daycares, head starts and private schools. In a perfect world, the schools would have complete access to their neighborhood libraries and youth librarians would be able to serve all of the children in their area. In the meantime, we do the best we can with what time we have.

So what did our Book Club participants think about coming to the public library for their book club? Here’s what they told Nanci when she asked:

- It is important because kids get the experience to check out lots of books and be able to have a connection.
- I think it is important because a lot of children love reading and because reading teaches people words that they don’t know and that’s why it is a good opportunity and without this it is hard to get books that you can’t find.
- Because the library is a useful resource for kids.
- I think it’s good so kids can learn to like reading.
- It is important to be friends with a public library because they’re nice once you get to know them.

We hope we can do an OBOB book club again next year (maybe meeting more than three times and including more kids from other schools). We’re also starting to talk about collaborating for some poetry month programming this April. What collaborations are you working on with your neighborhood public or school library? 

