

BOOKTALKS INCREASE CIRCULATION OF SPECIAL SECTIONS IN THE LIBRARY

*An action research project*

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### Abstract

The circulation statistics of a special section of a middle school library media center was found to be extremely low. In order to increase circulation of the Kentucky section, a research project was proposed. The researcher wanted to know what effect booktalks will have on the circulation statistics of the Kentucky section of the library. Circulation statistics were collected and analyzed over a three-week period. A survey of the 23 participants in the study group along with the analysis of the data indicated that students did check out more books from the Kentucky section after hearing the booktalks by the library media specialist.

## **BOOKTALKS INCREASE CIRCULATION OF SPECIAL SECTIONS IN THE LIBRARY**

Circulation of library materials at schools across the nation has seen a decline in recent years. Many reasons are offered as to why this trend continues. Some say that the advancement of technology is one of the leading causes for the lack of interest in reading. Students are being delivered to school buildings in minivans while watching DVD and then expected to sit quietly in a static classroom. Prensky (2001) states that one high school student complained that he had to “power down” when he came to school.

Prensky (2001) found the following:

“Our children today are being socialized in a way that is vastly different from their parents. The numbers are overwhelming: over 10,000 hours playing videogames, over 200,000 emails and instant messages sent and received; over 10,000 hours talking on digital cell phones; over 20,000 hours watching TV (a high percentage fast speed MTV), over 500,000 commercials seen—all before the kids leave college. And, maybe, *at the very most*, 5,000 hours of book reading. These are today’s —Digital Native students”(p. 2 ).

Even though students -- these “digital natives” (Prensky, 2001, p. 2 ) of today seem to be more interested in activities other than reading, many librarians feel that that a good way to increase book circulation is though the traditional stand and deliver booktalks. Booktalks give the student a preview of the book while piquing their interest. Careful consideration is taken as to not give the ending away during a book talking presentation.

### ***Problem***

Circulation statistics have been on a decline in a middle school media center. Since booktalks seem to be a favored way for many librarians to increase book checks out by students, this method was studied to see if it holds true for a particular section of the library.

***Research Question***

Question: What effect will booktalks have on the circulation statistics of the Kentucky section of the library?

Hypothesis: The students will check out more books from the Kentucky section after hearing the booktalks.

**Literature Review**

Over the last two decades, the percentage of Americans who read books of any sort has shown a steady decline (McLemee, 2004). Literature such as fiction, poetry, and drama seems to be one of the hardest hit areas (McLemee, 2004). These alarming statistics are not unlike the trends being seen by library media specialists in school libraries throughout the country. In the state of Washington, middle school media specialist Linda Riesterer found that the circulation in her library was decreasing and had been for the past few years (Riesterer, 2002).

In an effort to combat this problem, Riesterer turned to booktalks to increase the circulation of books in the library media center. By offering three different types of booktalks (book of the week, cart full of books, and classroom talks) Riesterer saw circulation statistics soar to record breaking numbers. Riesterer (2004) found that “about half” of the students “had checked out at least one of the books” (p. 9) she had featured.

On the opposite side of the country, New York library media specialist Ellen Frank says that for many students “finding an interesting book” can be “an overwhelming process” (Frank, 2006, p. 14). She, like Riesterer and countless others, uses booktalks much like an advertisement to promote the books. Frank also had students share in the book-talking process by creating and presenting booktalks to fellow classmates. Frank’s (2004) research showed “interest was aroused and circulation increased” (p. 14) due to the book talks.

One might ask for the definition of a book talk. LMS Terrance Young (2003) says it “is like a movie preview – it piques a student’s interest in reading a book” (p. 62). There are as many ways to give a booktalk as there are teachers and librarians to give them. Most people agree that one should at least read part of the book first, if not the entire book. Former middle school librarian, Sonja Cole (2007) states that she “always admits” when she has not finished a book. Being careful not to give away the ending is another common element for good booktalks (Cole, 2007).

A study of students in grades six through twelve conducted by Ruth Cox Clark found that boys and girls both prefer the first-person style booktalk as opposed to reading an excerpt or discussing the character(s) or an incident from the book (Clark, 2007).

According to Cathy Belben, “traditional stand-and-deliver booktalking is a great way to advertise new books” (Belben, 2007, p. 28), but she does offer alternatives to this practice. Using the Internet to browse book review web sites and blogs as well as setting up displays in the media center and keeping book review binders available for students are just a few of the ways Belben keeps up enthusiasm for reading (Belben, 2007).

Belben is not the only one turning to the Internet or technology when trying to reach students with booktalks to increase circulation. Florida professor, Terence Cavanaugh, found that “using a computer’s video player program, such as Windows Media Player, with downloaded or created booktalk videos, a teacher or library media specialist can set up a computer as a book advertising kiosk” (Cavanaugh, 2006, p. 56).

Teacher librarian Heather Gruenthal uses PowerPoint to present book talks. Gruenthal states, “The PowerPoint booktalk has many advantages over the traditional booktalk” (Gruenthal, 2008, p. 23). By using a projector all the students are able to see the slides and the actual book is sometimes passed around as the presentation unfolds. Gruenthal not only advocates the use of

presentation software in the creation of booktalks, but also blogs, wikis, and podcasts. The free software that is available for teachers and media specialists makes these processes easily attainable alternatives to the standard delivery method of traditional book talks.

Regardless of the method of delivery, booktalks have seemed to increase circulation statistics. According to Cavanaugh (2006), a study of the effects of booktalks in an elementary school found that 80 percent of students checking out books had been motivated by booktalks (which is similar to the findings of Riesterer and others.

## **Methodology**

### ***Subjects***

The participants for this study include 23 students (10 males and 13 females) in grade six. Of the 10 male students, one is African-American and the remaining nine are White. All the female students are White with the exception of one English speaking Hispanic student. None of the students have an individualized education plan, however they were all identified through scores on the Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) test of being weak in the area of reading comprehension. This particular group of students was selected for the study by virtue of them being enrolled in a reading study skills class.

The selected group was not informed that they were participating in a study as to not influence the results of the research.

### ***Apparatus***

Circulation Plus software (Version 6.40, 2007) by the Follett Company (IL) was used to collect the circulation statistics of the Kentucky section of the library. The letter "K" as part of the call number notes books included in this section.

### ***Design***

The library media specialist wants to increase the circulation of the Kentucky section of the library media center. This collection contains books about Kentucky and books by Kentucky authors. The LMS felt that if the students utilized this section it would increase their awareness of Kentucky and its history as well as provide a foundation of pride for their state.

The objective of the LMS is to motivate the students to check out books from the Kentucky section by booktalking the books to a selected group of students. A quantitative research designed that compared pre-circulation statistics to post-circulation statistics was used. A post survey was presented to the participants to see if the booktalks had any effect on the books they chose to check out. The independent variable is the booktalks and the dependent the checkout behavior of the students.

### ***Procedure***

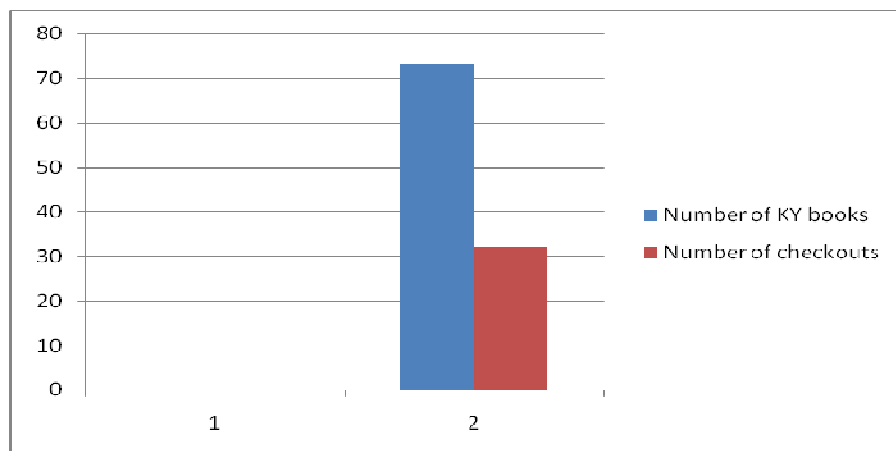
Sixth grade students come to the media center for book check out on Tuesdays of each week with their Language Arts teacher. This is their standard checkout time, but students are allowed to come back anytime throughout the week with permission of their teacher. The students selected for this research will be asked to listen to a booktalks on the Kentucky section of the media center the first 15 minutes of their 30 – 45 minute standard checkout time. Students will then be given the opportunity to check out any book in the library. On the first day of the research, the LMS will explain what the Kentucky section is and what types of books are shelved there. Even though this was done at the beginning of the year at library orientation, new students may have arrived since that time and did not receive the introduction to the special section. At the end of three weeks the LMS checked the circulation statistics of the books in the Kentucky

section to see if there was an increase. Students will be given a post survey to see if the booktalks motivated them in any way.

Data will be analyzed by comparing the pre and post circulation statistics of the Kentucky section using an Excel spreadsheet to create charts and graphs. Individual student responses to a survey will also be collected and used to analyze the data.

### ***Results***

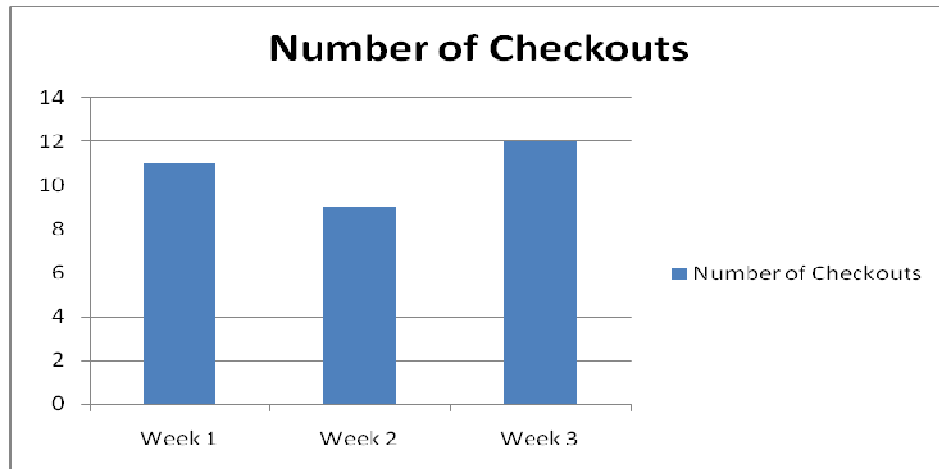
The Kentucky section houses 83 books of three different subsections (non-fiction, fiction, and biography). During the three weeks of booktalks over this section, circulation statistics improved to 32 checkouts as compared to the six checkouts from the eight week period prior to the booktalks. This is illustrated in figure 1.



**Figure 1. Pre-KY Book Checkouts**

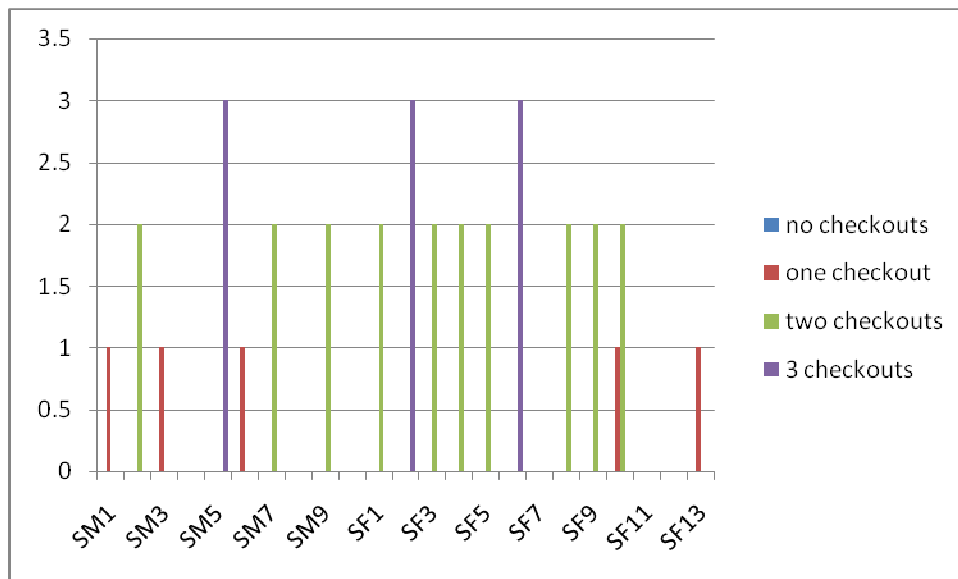
The breakdown of checkouts from the Kentucky section per week were as follows: week one – 11 checkouts, week two – nine checkouts, and week three – 12 checkouts as shown in the figure 2 below.





**Figure 2. Checkouts Per Weeks**

Of the 23 students in the study, 78% or 18 students checked out at least one book from the Kentucky section. Forty-three percent (10 students) checked out two books, and 13% (3 students) checked out three books. Individual results are shown in figure 3.



**Figure 3. Student Checkout**

Students were surveyed after they participated (unknowingly) in the study. The survey is attached hereto and labeled Appendix B. The researcher chose to develop a short, simple survey consisting of one yes or no question. If the participant answered yes to the question, they were

given a list of four reasons of which to attribute his or her answer. By developing this type of survey, the researcher was able to insure that the data obtained directly correlated to the research question, leaving no room for error. Of the 18 students that answered yes to checking out books from the Kentucky section, 15 attributed the choice to do so after hearing the booktalks by the library media specialist. The survey added an extra dimension to aid in answering the research question of why participants choose to check out a particular book.

### ***Discussion***

After an analysis of the data, it is reasonable to conclude that the circulation of the Kentucky section increased greatly during the three-week period of booktalks by the media specialist. Of the students surveyed, 83% said that it was due to the booktalks by the media specialist that led to their choice to check out books from the special section. This provides support of the hypothesis that the students will check out more books from the Kentucky section after hearing the booktalks.

### ***Future Research***

One way this research study could be improved is by providing more time for the study. Since the students were not used to booktalks by the LMS they may have been intrigued by the newness of the book talks. If they get used to coming to the media center and the librarian giving booktalks then more data can be collected to see if booktalks consistently improve the circulation statistics.

### ***Social Action***

With reading in most age groups (especially in the young adult category) seeing a steady decline, it is up to library media specialist to help improve these statistics wherever and whenever possible. Not unlike the findings in this study, other studies show an increase in book

circulation due to the impact of booktalks. Library media specialist have many options available to them to aid in the booktalk process. Besides the traditional stand-and-deliver booktalks, video booktalks are available online or can be made by students. One thing that I plan on doing next school year is creating a video booktalk kiosk. I plan on having contests for students to create video booktalks that will be added to the booktalk database. I think by developing this at my school that I could easily show other librarians how to create similar setups in their libraries. I am a huge proponent of using technology wherever possible to capture students' attention. Therefore, I think that video booktalks as well as the traditional stand-and-deliver booktalks are a win-win situation for all.

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## Appendix A

For this research project, I identified a potential area of concern in my library as the low circulation statistics of the Kentucky section. I decided to see if I could increase the circulation through the use of booktalks.

One of the hardest things to do with this project was the preparation for the book talks. Since I needed to know a lot about the 83 books in the collection, I had to choose my books carefully. I collaborated with a language arts teacher and she suggested current topics that the students were studying (Great Depression, Dust Bowl) and I tried to tie in these topics where I could.

I learned that it takes a lot of preparation to deliver booktalks that are interesting and appealing to the students. According to the knowledge I gained while researching for the literature review, one should never give a booktalk without reading the entire book. That just was not possible in the short time that I had to complete the project.

Another thing that I found myself doing throughout this project was looking at normal things in new ways. For example, while driving home from school on a rural, country road I saw the most beautiful flowers along the roadside. I noticed that these flowers grew in places that one could not pull off the road easily. Then, I started to wonder why the flowers grew in the places they did. Was it because one could not easily pick these wildflowers because of the location? Or, was it something to do with the soil type or the amount of sunlight or something else entirely? I found myself question a lot of things like that.

As for professional development, I think that I could benefit from more training in video production. When researching types of booktalks, I found that video booktalks are a great way

for students to learn about books. One thing that I want to implement next year is a dedicated computer just for video booktalks. Another area of professional development that I would like to be involved in is a cross-curriculum workshop. I found that by getting to know what each grade level or teacher teaches can be a great asset to me when selecting material for the library. I really enjoy collaborating with other teachers and would like to learn ways to make the process more seamless.

There was not much diversity with the 23 students that I worked with on this project. Had there been a diverse population, I don't think that I would have performed the book talks much differently. I wanted to get the students interested in the culture and history of Kentucky and to instill in them a sense of pride of being a Kentuckian.

One way I assessed myself was by checking the circ statistics after the students left the library. If the circ stats were up, then I felt like I was doing my job with the booktalks.

This project took me about six weeks to complete. Since the circulation software (Follett) does not allow me to run the circ stats for only one section of the library, I had to create an Excel spreadsheet and add all the books from the section. Then I looked at every book and checked the circ stats per book. I performed the research for three weeks and then collected and analyzed the data.

### **1.2.a Approaches challenges with a "can-do" attitude.**

I actually had a hard time at the beginning of this task. I did not feel like I was gaining enough of an understanding of what I needed to do. But, I was determined to do a good job. Then, everything just came together. I knew that I could accomplish anything I set my mind to. It turned out to be a great experience. Having the right attitude going into the task made all the difference.

**2.2.a Exudes enthusiasm for teaching and learning**

I was thrilled to book talk the Kentucky section. I have a personal passion for literature about the Appalachian region. I felt it necessary to be excited about the booktalks in order to get the students excited. I think that my enthusiasm for teaching and learning spills over all the time when I am with students. I love to see the excitement on students' faces when they come to the media center to search for books. .

**4.2.a Takes responsibility for developing and maintaining a positive learning environment.**

I want the students to feel comfortable when they come to the media center so I always try to make it an enjoyable experience for them. I think that by being enthusiastic about seeing them it makes the students feel valued and accepted. I was always prepared for the booktalks when the students came in, which I feel it a good modeling of a positive, professional environment.

**Appendix B****Reading Choices Survey**

1. Did you check out any books from the Kentucky section of the library during the last 3 weeks?

If you answered YES, what was the reason for your choice? Please circle one.

- a. Booktalk by Librarian
- b. Recommendation from student
- c. Recommendation from teacher
- d. Would have checked the book out anyway

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