

Book Talks

Prior to the launch of the Just Read project, students were given the opportunity to apply to be part of the newly created Junior School and Senior School Student Advisory Committees, crucial vehicles for student voice. Student voice is an important part of the Just Read project as it empowers students to promote their own ideas within the school, as well as be actively involved in running the project.

The student advisory committees meet regularly, every fortnight in the senior school and in the junior school approximately three times a term. The committee members map out a plan of action based on their observations and feedback from other students, and they check-in to refine the activities and share their progress amongst themselves. A teacher oversees each of the committees.

One of the first tasks the Junior School Committee explored was delivering book talks to Years 3-6, as research has shown that students become more interested and eager to read a particular novel after they have been involved in a discussion about it. Book talks are a highly effective way for students to share ideas about a novel they have recently read. They are oral descriptions of a text that are given with the intention of encouraging others to read the book. They briefly explore main characters, outlining the plot and themes in the story. Conversation stems such as 'I was surprised when', 'I noticed' and 'I learnt' are used to provoke and provide deeper thought about the text.

In preparation for presenting book talks to Year 3 to 6 classes, the Junior School Committee members prepared and practiced a book talk for each other. The committee then provided specific feedback on strengths and areas for improvement. After refining their work, the committee members liaised with classroom teachers to organise a time to present their book talks. Following this student modelling, the classes then developed and presented their own book talks. Once a student presented a book talk to their class they received a hand designed book mark as a gift from the Student Advisory Committee.

Then, in groups of three, Junior school committee members were assigned a K-2 class to present a series of three book talks. Committee members drafted and rehearsed their presentations before delivering them over a five week period. Almost universally, the students in the K-2 classes sought the book that they had just heard about to read themselves. The Student Advisory committee also presented bookmarks to those students who were highly engaged during Just Read.

Book talks morphed into virtual book talks in early 2021, to be displayed on the media screens throughout the Junior School. The Student Advisory Committee designed a template for the virtual book talk that allowed all students (K to 6) to access the material. This was another way to communicate diverse reading interest and it generated much discussion amongst the students.

The Committee also created a sequence of two book talk mini-lessons to be delivered to Years K-2. In small groups the students planned activities that included group work and book sharing in a 5 to 10 min time frame. These were highly successful lessons that were fun and generated much discussion amongst the students.

Book talks have had an impact. Since the start of Just Read, students have been increasingly borrowing more books outside of their scheduled library time. The most significant change has resulted from student discussion, recommending books to each other. After surveying a Year 3 class, it was apparent that students thought book talks provided them with new, exciting ideas of novels to read and highlighted a range of different genres to explore. Many students noted that book talks helped to build confidence when presenting in front of an audience. One student stated, "every time someone in the class recommends a book, I'm excited to borrow it from the library."

As teachers we know that presenting book talks introduces students to a wider selection of literature, whilst also building comprehension, speaking and listening skills. This helps to establish a reading community and culture within the classroom where students learn about each other as readers. Research shows the books that mean the most to us are the ones we discuss with our peers. Through the delivery of book talks, we are assisting students to become lifelong, habitual readers.

The Committee has provided students with an opportunity to develop leadership skills that would not have been possible without the Just Read program. Students were given the freedom and autonomy to plan and execute strategies to promote the project. Creating bookmarks, presenting book talks and designing digital book talks have been significant successes for the Committee.

Overseeing the Student Advisory Committee in the Junior School has been a rewarding experience. Watching students' eyes light-up when they bring forth an original and imaginative idea has been the true highlight of my involvement. The teamwork skills and behind the scenes collaboration demonstrated by each member are of equal importance. They are dedicated students who love books and it has been a pleasure watching them share their passion for reading at Queenwood.